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**Navigating the education marketplace
investigating choice amongst lower income families in Delhi, India**

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**Navigating the Education Marketplace:
Investigating Choice Amongst Lower Income Families
in Delhi, India**

Eleanor Gurney

King's College London

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education Research.

Abstract

In India, a rapidly expanding private sector and concurrent government policy trend towards market-based reforms have led to significant changes across the education landscape in recent years. In this thesis, I present an empirically grounded analytic account of how the education market in India works at the micro level, focusing on how lower income households navigate the decision-making process for elementary education. Adopting a collective case study research design, at the core of the study are in-depth interviews with education market ‘consumers’ (parents/caregivers) across three low income localities in Delhi about the values, interests and constraints that shape the educational choices they make for their children, and how the decision-making process is experienced and negotiated at the household level. An inductive approach is used for the analysis of this qualitative data.

Drawing on ideas and concepts from Bourdieu, as well as sociological research on consumption, I argue that parents’ quality perceptions were sensitive to signifiers of social distinction and other aspects of social identity, illuminating key drivers behind the growth of the private sector beyond a desire for education quality alone. At the same time, while all families faced significant challenges in both assessing and accessing quality education, families with ‘know how’ or other forms of capital were better able to utilise specific strategies for gaining admission to desirable schools. I also employ a gender lens to argue that, while the findings concerning family dynamics of decision-making indicate that ‘choice’ may offer mothers opportunities for greater voice within the domestic sphere, the gender order continues to shape both experiences of motherhood and girls’ access to schooling.

As a whole, the analysis draws attention to the socio-cultural nature of choice in real-world market settings and the contribution of schooling choices to the reproduction of social and educational inequalities. In doing so the thesis troubles the core assumptions of rational choice theory, which underpins much market thinking in education, in particular the idea that parents are rational ‘utility maximisers’ whose choices will drive up school quality and result in greater equality of access to quality schooling.

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List of Abbreviations

ASER	Annual Status of Education Report
BERA	British Educational Research Association
DFID	Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DISE	District Information System for Education
DoE	Directorate of Education
DPEP	District Primary Education Programme
DUSIB	Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board
EWS	Economically Weaker Sections
FYP	Five Year Plan
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
Gol	Government of India
JJC	Jhuggi Jhopri Cluster
km	Kilometre
KV	Kendriya Vidyalaya
LFP	Low Fee Private
LKG	Lower Kindergarten
MCD	Municipal Corporation of Delhi
MDG	Millennium Development Goal

MHRD	Ministry of Human Resource Development
NCT	National Capital Territory
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NIEPA	National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration
NPE	National Policy on Education
NSS	National Sample Survey
NUEPA	National University of Education Planning and Administration
OBC	Other Backwards Caste
PP	Pre-Primary
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PROBE	Public Report on Basic Education
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PUR	Private Unaided Recognised
PUU	Private Unaided Unrecognised
RPVV	Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalaya
Rs	Indian rupees
RTE	Right to Education
RQ	Research Question
SC	Scheduled Caste
SDMC	South Delhi Municipal Corporation
SMC	School Management Committee
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribe

SV	Sarvodaya Vidyalayas
TC	Transfer Certificate
UEE	Universal Elementary Education
UKG	Upper Kindergarten
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces the research study by providing an overview of the contexts surrounding processes of marketisation in India and associated debates concerning parental school choice (section 1.2). I also describe how I came to an investigation of the study topic (section 1.3), before detailing the study's key aims and objectives (section 1.4). Finally, I outline the overall structure of the thesis (section 1.5).

1.2 Contexts of the study

In India, the education landscape has undergone considerable change in recent decades. Driven by the goal of providing universal access to elementary education for all, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the Government of India's flagship primary education programme, has contributed to the influx of children entering primary schooling in the country (UNICEF, 2014). At the same time, there has been a similarly dramatic increase in the number of 'low fee' private (LFP) schools, the growth of which has been largely outside of formal government policy intervention or regulation (Tooley, Bao, Dixon & Merrifield, 2011). Whilst there is a lack of consensus as to what constitutes 'low fee' schooling (Day Ashley et al., 2014), the available empirical evidence suggests that an increasing proportion of children from households traditionally only able to access government schooling are attending private schools.

Indeed, in the context of near universal access to government elementary education, the 'mushrooming' of private sector institutions and the migration of

students away from the state to the non-state sector is striking, with 30% of children (ages 5 – 15) reported as enrolled at private schools in rural areas (Pratham, 2016) and 49% (ages 6 – 10) in urban areas (Kingdon, 2017) - although with some considerable variation amongst states and urban centres.¹ While some commentators have welcomed the emergence of the LFP sector on the grounds that it will increase access to quality education for low income households (Tooley & Dixon, 2005), a growing body of empirical research has illuminated several constraints to private school access based on intersections of gender (De, Khera, Samson & Kumar, 2011; Azam & Kingdon, 2013; Sahoo, 2016), economic status (Härmä, 2011), and caste (Hill, Samson & Dasgupta, 2011; Woodhead, Frost & James, 2013; Bhattacharya, Dasgupta, Mandal & Mukherjee, 2015; Kaur, 2017). Other commentators have also held that instead of constituting an ‘opportunity’ for lower income households,² private sector growth is driven largely by middle class and elite flight from the government sector, as Nambissan (2010) suggests: ‘Today, state schools are largely dominated by children from the poor, belonging mainly to ‘lower’ castes and minorities’ (p. 287). In addition, the quality of low fee schooling has been called into question with several studies identifying little, if any, ‘value-added’ from private institutions in the form of test score outcomes once the socio-economic background of pupils has been controlled for (Goyal & Pandey, 2009; Chudgar & Quin, 2012; Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2015).

Despite the mixed evidence concerning school quality and access, however, enhancing parental choice has emerged as a discernible policy trend at the national level, in part a reflection of transnational advocacy networks that advocate choice as a ‘solution’ to issues of poor quality and social inequality (Nambissan & Ball, 2010). In a nutshell, the argument of school choice advocates is that choice will stimulate market competition, encouraging organisational efficiency and responsiveness to

¹ For example, data indicate that 25% of children (ages 6 – 10) were enrolled in private schools in urban areas of West Bengal in 2014-15 (Kingdon, 2017), while an earlier study based in the city of Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh state reported that private enrolment was as high as 65% in at least some areas of the city (Tooley, Dixon & Gomathi, 2007).

² While ‘lower income’ is also indicative of economic status, I use this term instead of ‘the poor’ throughout this thesis because of the loaded nature of this latter term (see Chapter 3, section 3.4.5).

consumer demand, resulting in sectoral quality improvements as popular, high-performing schools are able to expand and unpopular, ‘failing’ schools are forced to close. Underpinned by rational choice theory, such a model assumes that parents will act in their child’s best interests and will maximise utility by choosing the ‘best’ school based on academic quality (Bosetti, 2004; Berends & Sottola, 2009).

As a specific policy mechanism for increasing parental choice, Clause 12(c) of the 2009 Right to Education Act (RtE Act) compels all unaided private schools to reserve 25% of their places in Class I (or pre-school, if available) for free for all children from economically and socially disadvantaged groups until they reach the end of elementary school in Class VIII.³ Empirical evidence concerning the impact of the reservation on decision-making remains limited, although initial reports suggest that in practice choices for lower income and disadvantaged groups remain constrained. For example, Mehendale, Mukhopadhyay & Namala (2015) note a lack of awareness of the RtE Act amongst eligible households in Delhi and Bangalore. Srivastava & Noronha (2016) also identify issues including non-compliance by schools and the apparent necessity of additional household resources to secure admission, concluding that fully-free education remains ‘an elusive myth for all’ (p. 575).

At the same time, there is a growing trend towards public-private partnerships (PPPs) at all levels of education (Fennell, 2007; Srivastava, 2010). In line with the casting of parent-citizens within policy discourse as ‘customers’ (Planning Commission, 2004), the framing of choice as ‘necessary’ within the contemporary education market in India is made explicit by Verger & VanderKaaij (2012), who point toward a widespread disillusionment with government schooling within public discourse: ‘in India, an open *discourse on the low quality of education in government institutions prevails amongst the public* [...] those who *have* a choice opt for non-government schools’ [emphasis in original] (pp. 250-251).

However, to date very little research has looked in detail either at the processes driving the growth of the private sector by focusing on the dynamics of

³ Elementary education in India comprises lower primary (Classes I-V, age 6-11) and upper primary (Classes VI-VIII, age 12-14).

education decision-making within households or has explored how households are navigating this rapidly shifting education landscape within a local market context. Notable exceptions include: Srivastava (2008), who explores school choice amongst households accessing two low fee private schools in Uttar Pradesh; Hill et al. (2011), who detail the dynamics of school choice in one village in rural Rajasthan; and, James & Woodhead (2014), who focus on the decision-making processes of frequent school movers as part of a broader scale, longitudinal study into children's lives in Andhra Pradesh. Investigations of the socio-cultural aspects of choice-making, in particular, remain a significant gap within the literature concerning low fee private schooling, part of the wider and substantial evidence gap concerning the implications of pro-privatisation education policies for countries in the Global South.⁴ In this thesis it will be argued that paying careful attention to the socio-cultural aspects of choice-making is essential if we are to better understand the implications of school choice policies for equality of educational opportunity and for social equality more generally.

The existing literature on school choice has also not addressed the diversity of provision that exists across both private and public sectors within and between states. For example, Juneja (2010) identifies hierarchies of government schools in Delhi, which are related to levels of resource allocation, level of schooling and the selectivity of admissions criteria. An appreciation of such nuances and the diversity within school types has been largely absent from much of the debate surrounding the rise of the low fee private sector, where schools, enrolment patterns and issues of quality are often reduced to a simplistic public-private binary. Yet how households accessing both private and government schooling understand differences between schools is required for a more developed understanding of their schooling decisions, as well as to the equality implications of choice policies than is currently available. Moreover, the prevalence of households accessing private tuition services (Pratham, 2014; Sujatha, 2014) indicates the necessity of not considering schooling choices in isolation, but in relation to the various services that comprise local education markets and households' perceptions of these in relation to their schooling decisions

⁴ I use the term 'Global South' here and elsewhere in this thesis to refer to the group of countries that are low income, often politically and culturally marginalised, and primarily (although not exclusively) located in the Southern hemisphere (Dados & Connell, 2012).

for their children.

Building upon previous work concerning low fee private schooling and school choice in India, this research study seeks to address these gaps within the literature through a qualitative investigation of the school decision-making processes of households in three low income localities in Delhi. Whilst this study focuses on a specific education setting and group of households in India, the findings have relevance to other studies of school choice by drawing attention to the socio-cultural nature of choice-making. For example, the thesis examines the influence of parental identity on schooling decisions, as well as the gendered nature of schooling decisions, both underexplored areas within the wider school choice literature. In doing so, it also seeks to interrogate rational choice assumptions that underlie much of the advocacy for the LFP sector and parental choice mechanisms in education more generally. In this way, and in contrast to a rational choice framework, the thesis seeks to illuminate the subjective, the fortuitous and the intimate realities of decision-making processes in local settings, and to contribute in turn to a more developed understanding of the impact of the increased marketisation of education for social equality.

1.3 Genesis of the inquiry

My interest in India and in the LFP sector stems from my previous employment with a private foundation with operations in India. An English teacher in the UK by professional background, I made my first trip to Delhi in 2012, the first of several visits that year to work on a small number of education initiatives focused on teacher development and school access. This was my first direct introduction to the LFP sector, although I had been aware previously of the extensive nature of private provision in India and elsewhere.

While my perception of school providers was naturally influenced by my own experiences of education and as a teacher in a different national context, the work of some researchers celebrating the potential of the LFP sector as the solution to failures within the government system (for example Tooley & Dixon, 2005) seemed

at odds with my observations at the many private, and government, schools that I visited in Delhi and other cities in India through the course of my work. Ultimately, this steered me to try to develop my understanding of the reasons why a growing number of parents, even from apparently very low income households, were choosing to send their children to private schools.

Reflecting the comparative lack of research on market-based education reforms in lower income country contexts, I found little within the existing literature that explored how parents distinguished between schools, beyond a general assertion that parents perceived private schools to be of superior quality. Parental understandings of school quality, however, and of the purposes of education and schooling, remained elusive. Equally, the lived experiences of parents within a complex school market was a gap within the literature that seemed significant in view of recent government reforms diversifying government provision and introducing new choice mechanisms. While the empirical literature has grown since the time that the study was first conceived and since the period of fieldwork, which has helped to inform the data analysis, school choice remains an area of emerging research within the Indian context.

1.4 Research aims and questions

Central to this research study is a concern to interrogate the claim of choice advocates that school choice policies improve the educational opportunities available to socially and economically disadvantaged groups. Through exploring the ways in which lower income households are navigating the increasingly diverse terrain of the contemporary education market, the study seeks to understand how and why parents choose the schools and services that they do for their children, and to consider how these choices may disrupt and/or contribute to educational and social inequality.

In recognition of the multiple aspects of social identity that have been shown to impact upon school enrolment in India, including gender, religion and caste, this study seeks to investigate decision-making at the household level within a local market setting to allow the 'peculiarities and particularities' (Clarke, 2013, p. 23) of

household decision-making to be explored. In doing so, I recognise that contexts (including the material, social, political and cultural) are not simply background within the study, but are 'constitutive of the action' (ibid., p. 22). As Clarke (2013) argues, social actions such as decision-making are 'animated' by the contexts in which they are situated; to remove contexts from action is to lose an essential understanding of the contexts that have combined to render such action possible. This includes the policy contexts surrounding decision-making in education at district, state and national levels, as well as the socio-cultural and economic contexts of the wider locality in which households are living. The material context of the local area, such as the number and type of schools nearby, is also relevant, although it should be noted that exploring household decision-making within a local market setting does not mean that contexts are considered only in relation to spatial conceptions of place. Indeed, akin to what Massey (1994) proposes as spatiality produced by intersecting social relations, multiple relationships and connections are understood as having produced the particular places that are the subjects of the current study, which I argue are of relevance to a nuanced understanding of decision-making at the household level. Therefore, the study adopts a nested approach, situating decision-making at the household level within case sites that are themselves nested within the local neighbourhood, district, city and nation (Clarke, 2013, p. 23), and also attending to conceptions of place that are relational in nature and transcend geographical boundaries, such as those associated with religious and caste affiliations.

Guided by these concerns, the following research questions (RQs) were developed to address the primary research aim of investigating the decision-making processes of households within the study settings in order to interrogate the claims of choice advocates that school choice policies improve the educational opportunities available to socially and economically disadvantaged groups by providing enhanced access to a better quality education:

RQ1: What are the contexts in which parents are making decisions about their children's education?

RQ2: How do parents distinguish between schools?

RQ3: How do parents experience and negotiate choice processes?

RQ4: What are the consequences of increased marketisation for social equality?

The research questions aim to investigate decision-making by individual households within their respective socio-economic and cultural contexts (RQ1) and to connect micro processes of choice to macro issues of social inequality (RQ4). In doing so, it is important to note that, while the study was born from a desire to better understand the drivers behind private sector growth, the research questions do not focus on only those parents accessing private schooling, in recognition that such choices may only be fully understood in relation to households accessing government or other forms of provision (Cameron, 2011). Thus, the research questions reflect a concern with understanding why *all* parents (i.e. those accessing private and/or government schooling) choose the schools that they do by focusing on how parents distinguish between schools based on both quality and non-quality indicators that may intersect with socio-cultural factors at the household level (RQ2). In addition, to contribute to a more developed understanding of choice processes within the study settings, the research questions focus on how choices are made both within households and how such choices were negotiated within the wider market (RQ3). This also includes how parents seek to transform choice preferences into choice outcomes with respect to school admissions, how parents make sense of the various constraints to action that they experience within this process, and the choices that they report making in response to choice 'failures'.

By connecting school choice and issues of social inequality, however, I do not seek to contribute to what Srivastava (2005) notes are deficit assumptions about lower income parents within public discourses in India surrounding school choice, nor to describe a form of social reproduction that Connell (2007) likens to a 'danse

macabre’ (p. 41), whereby individuals are deprived of social agency. Instead, my purpose is more aligned to Young’s (2011) proposal to investigate the operation of individual agency within highly constrained circumstances and its implications for social justice:

To say that structures constrain does not mean that they eliminate freedom; rather, social-structural processes produce differentials in the kinds and range of options that individuals have for their choices. The issue of social justice raised by the operation of social structures is whether these differences in the kinds and range of options made available to individuals by these structures are fair.

(pp. 55 – 56)

Thus, I am seeking to investigate the range and kinds of options available to parents within the study settings and their decision-making within such contexts, and to use this data to consider the consequences of increased marketisation for social equality.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

Having outlined the broad rationale for the study and the associated research aims, the remainder of the thesis is structured as follows:

Chapter 2 sets the scene for further exploration and analysis of household decision-making processes in education by providing an overview of elementary education policy and recent reforms both at the national level in India and as mediated in Delhi. The chapter provides a critical analysis of the evolving policy discourses surrounding the pursuit of Universal Elementary Education (UEE) with special reference to the framing of the roles and responsibilities of parents and the state within such policy texts over time. The growth of private provision in recent years is also detailed, along with associated ‘grey areas’ in policy regulation.

Chapter 3 draws upon conceptual and empirical insights from India and elsewhere to examine the arguments for and against a market-led mode of delivery for school education, and the implications of privatisation for the reproduction of social inequalities. Gaps in knowledge concerning the choices of lower income and disadvantaged groups in India are also detailed. Moving away from rational choice

models, the chapter signals an alternative conceptual framework for examining the nature of choice-making, which is further developed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4 details the overall research strategy and design of the study. This is followed by a detailed overview of the research process, including methods of data collection. The chapter then discusses how ethical issues were addressed in the field, and reflects on issues of researcher positionality, language and translation, and the role of research assistants and translators. In the final section of this chapter the methods of data analysis are explained.

Building on the conceptual framework outlined at the end of Chapter 4, Chapter 5 provides an overview of the key theoretical resources used in the data analysis. This encompasses Bourdieu's (1977) theory of practice, which I use to provide analytic insights into the ways in which parents are differently advantaged within education markets. I also draw together insights from interpretivist research on consumption to support an in-depth examination of the relationship between parental identity construction and schooling decisions, and the social meanings that certain schooling choices may convey. To enable an examination of gender relations within choice processes, Connell's (1987; 2009) gender and power framework and other relevant insights from feminist scholarship, including Collins' (1994) concept of 'motherwork' are also explicated.

Turning to the empirical findings, Chapter 6 builds on the policy overview presented in Chapter 2 by focusing on the provision for the urban poor and school education system within the city of Delhi, as well as thick descriptions (Geertz, 1975) of each case study site. The local education markets within each case are detailed, illuminating the heterogeneity of provision within both government and private sectors, and across case sites. I also outline school enrolment patterns amongst interview households across the case sites to provide a springboard for interpretation within the subsequent empirical chapters.

In Chapter 7, I present findings concerning parents' articulations of education and school quality, and how quality perceptions intertwined with non-quality factors to produce choice preferences. I identify and outline four key categories of parent chooser (disengaged, minimally engaged, aspirational and community choosers)

based on their articulation of quality and how quality was incorporated into their choice-making. I argue that across all categories parents lacked the requisite skills to judge quality effectively, that key quality proxies (English and fee-paying private) reflect the manifestation of social distinctions, and that educational quality was not the only factor parents considered, with social identity (specifically, regional and religious affiliations) playing an important role in school selection. I also outline the importance of gender in shaping conceptions of 'suitable' schooling options.

Seeking to add greater nuance to the categories of parent chooser outlined in Chapter 7, Chapter 8 focuses on the negotiation of choice within the home. Within the context of changing familial structures in contemporary society, the enduring influence of extended family relationships to choice-making, and drawing on Collins' (1994) concept of motherwork, I argue that children's education and associated choice work offered some mothers opportunities for asserting private forms of empowerment in the home in the negotiation of their maternal authority. However, such opportunities are shown to be inequality distributed, sensitive to locally produced articulations of gender, caste and class ideologies. Building on the discussion in Chapter 7 of how gender shaped decision-making, I also argue that enduring gender norms may co-opt motherwork as part of the demands placed on women to enact particular forms of mothering that reflect middle class aspirations and ideals.

Turning to the negotiation of choice outside the home, Chapter 9 examines constraints that parents faced as they sought to realise choice preferences within the market, illuminating how parents interpreted the barriers and compromises made during choice processes. This includes the difficulties parents faced in assessing learning in practice and fulfilling academic ambitions for their children. In the analysis, the strategic work that some parents undertook also highlights the role of different forms of capital, as well as luck, in the realisation of choice preferences. Identifying the enduring lack of both voice and exit amongst parent 'consumers', I argue that while education reforms place new demands on parents to choose, parents are differentially advantaged in their ability to exercise meaningful choice in practice.

Finally, Chapter 10 concludes by synthesising the key themes addressed throughout the thesis, in doing so highlighting its key empirical and analytic insights. This chapter also discusses the policy implications and methodological contributions of the study. In view of these conclusions, areas for future inquiry are also proposed.

CHAPTER 2

SETTING THE SCENE

The National Policy Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the scene for the exploration and analysis of household decision-making processes in education by providing a synopsis of significant changes in the school education system in India over recent decades. More specifically, given the central concerns of this thesis with marketisation and household choice-making vis a vis elementary education, I seek to examine the nature of the shifting and at times opaque relationship between the family, the private sector and the state in policy discourses. Throughout the chapter, while the focus lies at the national level, I also signal at key junctures how these national policies are mediated in Delhi.

The chapter begins by focusing on governance structures for elementary education and provides a critical analysis of the evolving policy discourse surrounding Universal Elementary Education (UEE) (section 2.2). I argue that, in addition to the overall complexity of governance structures, underfinancing, differentiated provision, decentralisation reforms and discourses of parental ‘participation’ provide a wider context for the failure to achieve UEE and the growth of private provision in India. I build on this analysis in the next section of the chapter, where I outline the growth of the private sector, policy reforms designed to foster choice and hierarchies between schools, and significant ‘grey areas’ in government regulation concerning private education (section 2.3). Finally, I focus on how parents are positioned in policy discourses, including the new demands on parents that notions of consumer-citizenship imply (section 2.4).

2.2 Elementary school education: policy-making and governance

In very broad terms, India's development from the late modern era⁵ to the present day can be divided into three phases: the colonial period; the post-Independence era; and the more recent period of India's increasing integration into the global economy (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011). While not addressing each period in a strictly linear way throughout this chapter, it is important to consider the historical contexts of more contemporary phenomena, including the growth of private schooling in the country.

Under British colonial rule, education policy was geared largely towards training a select share of the population to maintain the colonial regime (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011). The Macaulay Minute on Indian Education (1838), for example, is explicit as to the role of education in the creation of a new class of worker for the British Empire, representing it as one part of Britain's wider 'civilizing mission' in India:

It is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern - a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect.

(para. 34)

Thus, the role of the colonial state in direct provision of education was restricted to the relatively small number of English-medium schools and universities (Bashir, 2003), while responsibility for implementation was devolved largely to provincial governments (Whitehead, 2005). Exacerbated by consistently low funding for education, this led to significant regional diversity in provision, as well as hierarchies of access to English-medium education along social class and caste lines (Bhattacharya, 2002; Majumdar & Mooij, 2011). In particular, the prevalence of

⁵ From the mid-1800s to 1945.

missionary and locally run 'grant-in-aid'⁶ schools were higher in districts with a greater proportion of Christians and higher caste groups (Chaudhary, 2009), with English education functioning as a strategy of consolidation of enduring socioeconomic advantages by the colonial middle class (Fernandes, 2006).

In the period immediately following Independence, education continued to be the prime responsibility of state governments under the Constitution. However, this relationship has evolved over time towards greater legislative powers for central government and an associated increasing financial commitment. This relationship between states and central government with respect to school level education is detailed in the following section.

2.2.1 The relationship between states and centre

The structure of the current school education system in India was determined in the post-Independence period by the National Policies on Education of 1968 (NPE 1968) and 1986 (NPE 1986), the latter of which was later modified in 1992 (NPE 1992). With education still a state level concern rather than a directive of central government, the NPE 1968 was significant in laying out the development of the Common School System, envisioned as a nationally standardised, statutory education system and based on the recommendations of the Indian Education Commission (1964-66), popularly referred to as the Kothari Commission.⁷

Whilst implementation of the NPE 1968 was uneven between states (Premi, 2001), it marked a key turning point for central and state governments in terms of education policy and planning. Prior to this, and in accordance with the guidelines laid down in India's Constitution post-Independence, central government had assumed an advisory rather than directive role in relation to school level education

⁶ Grant-in-aid schools (referred to as private aided schools within this thesis) were introduced in India in 1859 with the aim of providing some government financial support to local schools established by a non-profit group (Bashir, 2003).

⁷ The Kothari Commission was established by the Government of India to examine all aspects of the education system and to advise government on future guiding principles and policies (Bagulia, 2004).

across the country, establishing a number of national agencies in the decade following with the mandate to advise state-level institutions in education provision and to play a leadership role through setting standards across the system (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011). Indeed, while the Kothari Commission recommended a greater role for central government in terms of legislative responsibility for school education, this was not included within the NPE 1968 explicitly. Indeed, school education was only added to the Concurrent List almost a decade later through a constitutional amendment in 1976.

Following this constitutional amendment and continuing the trend towards greater centralisation of legislative responsibility for school education, NPE 1986 and NPE 1992 extended the responsibilities of central government to include direct involvement in achieving key policy targets, with a focus on educational quality:

While the role and responsibility of the States regarding education will remain essentially unchanged, the Union Government would accept a larger responsibility to reinforce the national and integrative character of education, to maintain quality and standards (including those of the teaching profession at all levels) [...] and, in general, to promote excellence at all levels of the educational pyramid throughout the country. Concurrence signifies a partnership, which is at once meaningful and challenging; the National Policy will be oriented towards giving effect to it in letter and spirit.

(Ministry of Human Resource Development [MHRD], 1998, p. 7)

In addition to such legislative changes, Sharma (2002) notes that among unique features of both NPE 1986 and NPE 1992 were their accompanying Programmes of Action, or detailed actions plans for policy implementation. Under the NPE 1986, this included the improvement of school facilities programme Operation Blackboard,⁸ the establishment of District Institutes of Education and Training, and Minimum Levels of Learning, all introduced with the intention to improve the quality of education within schools (Dyer, 1996). In more recent years, schemes such as

⁸ A centrally sponsored scheme which detailed the minimum criteria of a primary school: two rooms, two teachers, and 'minimum essential' teaching learning aids (Dyer, 1996).

SSA⁹ and Midday Meal¹⁰ have continued the trend of central government mandated intervention programmes to achieve prescribed national policy objectives. The RtE Act is a more recent as well as the most comprehensive example of central government establishing national quality norms, albeit based largely upon school inputs,¹¹ with considerable implications for states in terms of implementation and financial commitments.

In terms of financial commitments, data indicates that the relative share of state governments of expenditure for elementary education has fallen since 2000 as proportional contributions from the centre have increased:

Table 2.1 States/Centre proportional expenditure on elementary education

Level of Government	Years	
	2000-2001	2010-2011
States	89%	76%
Centre	11%	24%

Source: Tilak (2011; 2015)

Despite this relative shift in financial contributions, states still contribute most of the funds for elementary education and are responsible for the implementation on the ground of nationally-led policies. As such, education provision at the elementary level is governed by a combination of state-devised policies, some of which may be passed by state governments and others that may be circulated through executive order by the relevant state Department of Education (Premi, 2001).

The complex relationship between state and centre is intensified within Delhi. Granted partial statehood as a federally administered Union Territory in 1956, Delhi was reclassified as the National Capital Territory (NCT) in 1991. In terms of

⁹ See p. 14. SSA goals include universal access and retention, bridging of gender and social category gaps in elementary education, and achieving significant enhancement in learning levels of children.

¹⁰ A national level free school meal programme supported under SSA, Midday Meal is the largest feeding programme of its kind in the world (Shrivastava, Shrivastava & Ramasamy, 2014).

¹¹ The conceptualisation of quality within the RtE Act is discussed further in Chapter 3.

governance structures, NCT Delhi comprises nine districts and three statutory towns - the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the New Delhi Municipal Council and the Delhi Cantonment Board – as well as numerous towns and villages within the wider periphery of the city. The MCD is further divided into three Municipal Corporations (North, South and East), each with responsibility for education provision and administration within these areas. At the same time, the Delhi Directorate of Education (DoE Delhi) is responsible for overall oversight of education in the city. While not limited to education, the last *Delhi Development Report* (Planning Commission, 2009) acknowledges the complexity of governance structures has resulted in confusion and at times the deliberate avoidance of accountability by government agencies in the city:

The citizen is confused about the agency that should be approached for a particular service or grievance. It also enables the agencies to pass the buck to other agencies for failure or inefficient or ineffective implementation of programmes.

(p. 32)

This complex policy landscape, which has resulted in the absence of a uniform 'state' within local education markets and a lack of coherence concerning sectoral oversight, is further complicated by a parallel trend towards greater decentralisation of responsibility for policy implementation down to the local community level within states. However, although such an approach is championed by key actors at both national and global levels, predicated on both democratic and utilitarian objectives (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2006), as I outline in the following section, there is a contrast between policy discourses concerning community participation in school education and local realities that have been documented by empirical research.

2.2.2 The trend towards decentralisation

The trend towards education decentralisation is not unique to India. Indeed, Channa (2015) posits that '[d]ecentralisation is probably the single most advocated reform for improving the provision of basic services such as education in developing

countries' (p. 2). While I expand on the arguments for a 'small state' approach to public service delivery in Chapter 3, it is important to point out that specific decentralisation programmes are far from homogenous, and have taken shape in different national contexts in complex and varied ways (World Bank, 2004; Channa, 2015). In this section, I focus on the shifting discourses concerning decentralisation and community 'participation' in India that reflect an attempt on the part of the Indian government in recent years to reimagine the relationship between the state, school providers and parents.

The political significance of community participation in education has a long history in the Indian context. As noted by Govinda & Diwan (2003), the relationship between local community and the school featured heavily in policy rhetoric in the Independence era: 'In Gandhi's scheme of education, a school or any educational setup was an integral part of the community' (p. 11). Falling off the policy agenda in the 1960s and 1970s, the community participation rhetoric was reinvigorated by the NPE 1986 with repeated references to involvement by the local community (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). This included both the expectation of financial contributions from the community to schools and the expectation that the community, together with government, would take a role in overseeing school activities. For example:

The Government and the community should endeavour to create conditions, which will help motivate and inspire teachers on constructive and creative lines.

(MHRD, 1998, pp. 31-32)

More recently, School Management Committees (SMCs), which include local community members, have been made compulsory for all government and private aided schools under the RtE Act. The SSA framework for the implementation of the RtE Act also emphasises community engagement with schools as a foundation of the programme:

Community participation would be a central and overarching factor in planning, implementation and monitoring interventions for universal elementary education.

(MHRD, 2011a, p. 83)

Arguments for the benefits of decentralisation and community participation in education are made based on both political and utilitarian rationales (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2006). Utilitarian arguments hold that local bodies are better able than government bureaucrats to make decisions about efficient resource distribution and are more motivated to do so because of their vested interest in the improvement of local facilities. Overlapping with this, political arguments for decentralisation posit that more representativeness and equity in educational decision-making at the local level will lead to greater local commitment to public education (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). Whilst Govinda & Bandyopadhyay (2010) argue that in the post-Independence period a political commitment to empowerment and democracy drove policy recommendations for the decentralisation of educational governance, more recent policy discourse in the post-1990s era reflects a more utilitarian emphasis on systemic efficiency, perhaps reflecting what some critics have identified as the advocacy work of multilateral agencies encouraging decentralisation in many national contexts during this period (De Grauwe, 2005).¹² Indeed, the 10th Five Year Plan¹³ (Planning Commission, 2002) is explicit about the perceived relationship between local oversight, cost effectiveness and quality:

Planning from below and contextualised resource allocation for basic services would not only be more cost effective and produce better results but will also ensure that the quality of the services is directly proportional to the degree of community control and supervision.

(Vol. 2, p. 38)

Thus, the 10th FYP states that ‘community participation is the surest way to ensure UEE’ (ibid., p. 39), and places special emphasis on the creation of ‘a community-

¹² Channa (2015), for example, notes the substantial financial commitments from the World Bank towards decentralization projects across various countries, which totalled around \$36 billion between 1990 and 2006.

¹³ Centralised national plans that cover all aspects of the economy and social sectors.

based monitoring system evolved with full transparency' (ibid.). The concept of participation leading to greater awareness of the benefits of education, and hence better quality through demand at the local school level, is also made explicit in the context of recommendations regarding the role of the community in monitoring and motivating parents to re-enrol their children in school:

Where the children are dropping out because of the need to work, the emphasis would be on involving the community in motivating the parents to bring their children back to school so that they are in a position to complete eight years of elementary education.

(ibid., p.38)

In this conceptualisation, parents thus are the 'problem' in the fulfillment of UEE and a de-contextualised 'community' is designated responsibility for their reform.

Reflecting the more recent shift in discourses of 'participation' to a new political emphasis on parental rights and responsibilities for children's education, an issue I expand on in section 2.4.1, the 12th FYP decentralises even further to the household level, with parents now framed as the key to quality improvement in education: 'parents have to be more effectively engaged so that they demand better quality education and result-oriented teaching-learning process' (Planning Commission, 2013, Vol. 3, p. 86). Similarly, policy rhetoric framing parents as monitoring agents is present within the SSA framework for the implementation of the RtE Act: 'Parents would need to play a more active role in school in monitoring the implementation of RTE stipulations' (MHRD, 2011a, p. 90). The focus on parents within education policy texts and the changing demands on the state and the family that these policy texts call for will be discussed later in this chapter. At this point, it is simply important to note the shift in focus over time from the community to individual parents as the central agents of system monitoring, management and quality improvement.

Reflecting research findings from other national contexts concerning the 'elite capture' of community participation schemes (see Channa, 2015), existing empirical research in India has suggested that SMCs and other similar bodies have not lived up to policy expectations. Majumdar & Mooij (2011), for example, describe

a lack of interest in SMC and Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) membership across their study sites in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, except in cases where these positions were associated with social prestige. In such instances, the authors also report unsubstantiated accounts of corrupt membership practices, 'instances where membership was auctioned off to the highest bidder' (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011, p. 55). Similarly, Powis (2003) notes the role of SMCs as stepping-stones to political careers in Andhra Pradesh. The RtE Act SSA Implementation document (MHRD, 2011a) also acknowledges a disconnect between the ascribed role of such committees and how they function in practice, highlighting social inequalities that have inhibited meaningful participation by community members:

Past experience has shown that mere setting up of committees does not ensure their meaningful participation in programmes. Moreover, although provision is made in membership of these committees for inclusion of women and persons from disadvantaged communities, in reality, they are excluded from decision-making processes.

(p. 69)

In summary, the simultaneous trends towards decentralisation and centralisation have meant that, whilst central government has assumed greater control over education policymaking, planning and funding in education, responsibility for implementation and monitoring has become increasingly devolved to the local level. Indicating a shift from political discourses of empowerment in the post-Independence era, discourses of community 'participation' in education in more recent years have focused increasingly on parents, indicating new demands on parents as key monitoring agents on behalf of the state, and, as will be further discussed in section 2.3.1, reflecting global political influences relating to decentralisation reforms. However, while 'participation' has been pursued in the name of achieving UEE, empirical evidence suggests that this has proven problematic in practice. It is to an overview of how government policy has engaged with the issue of UEE over time that this chapter now turns.

2.2.3 Key policies concerning Universal Elementary Education (UEE)

Achieving UEE has long been a policy concern within India at both national and state levels, dating back to the years before Independence. An early push for a legislative basis for UEE came in 1911 from G. K. Gokhale, a senior leader within the Indian National Congress party, who introduced a private Parliamentary bill for the gradual introduction of compulsory elementary education (Kaur, 2013). While this bill was rejected, other attempts at the state level to introduce free and compulsory education persisted throughout the pre-Independence period. For example, the Delhi 1927 FYP for education expansion included the gradual introduction of free and compulsory primary schooling in ten areas of the city and its rural suburbs (Sharma, 2011). Gaining momentum within the India Independence Movement of the 1930s and 40s, free and compulsory education on a national scale was ratified as a key resolution after the All-India Educational Conference of 1937 (Kaur, 2013).¹⁴

Post-Independence, free and compulsory elementary education was included within the Directive of Principles of State Policy within the new Constitution, furthering UEE as a key area for policy action. Notably, this was coupled with a time-bounded target for the achievement of education for all:

The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years.
(Constitution of India, 1950, Article 45)

In policy discourse from this period, the provision of free and compulsory education for all was framed as essential to India's socio-economic and cultural development, and to processes of national integration in the early years post-Independence: '[the NPE 1968] aimed to promote national progress, a sense of common citizenship and culture, and to strengthen *national* integration [emphasis in original]' (MHRD, 1998, p. 2). However, despite such policy rhetoric placing education at the heart of a unified India, the achievement of free and compulsory education at the elementary level has remained elusive. Indeed, despite the number of primary schools in the

¹⁴ Also known as the Wardha Education Conference.

country more than doubling between 1950 and 1988 from 209,700 to 548,100, and the introduction of various incentive schemes (Govinda & Varghese, 1993, p. 2), by the late 1980s as many as 30 to 40 million children aged 6 to 14 were estimated to be out of school (Colclough & De, 2010).

In tracing the development of the UEE policy agenda within India at the national level, it is important to set this within the international political context of education agenda setting. Efforts surrounding the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the development of the Education for All movement in the early 1990s, and later the launch of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000,¹⁵ signalled a period of international scrutiny of India's progress towards achieving UEE, as well as an associated increase in financial support. Notably, whilst the Government of India strongly resisted external funding for education programmes until the late 1980s (Abadsi, 2002, p. iii), a growing number of externally funded state level projects in basic education in the late 1980s and 1990s served to reinvigorate the UEE agenda. This included the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), a centrally sponsored scheme supported by external funders,¹⁶ which comprised a broad set of guidelines for primary education reform. Launched in 1994, a year after India's Supreme Court declared education to be a fundamental right for every child, the programme included the construction of new schools and the supply of incentives in the form of materials and textbooks to all girls and to boys belonging to a Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST). In accordance with this renewed focus on UEE, Little (2010) reports the view of senior government administrators that there was a 'growing political will for basic education around this time' (p. 30). Others have also noted the influence of global economic competition and international organisations on social policy at the national level, citing the inclusion of elementary education as a fundamental right within India's Constitution in 2002 as a public signal of

¹⁵ Achieving universal primary education was enshrined as one of eight goals within the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000; collectively, the goals are known as the MDGs.

¹⁶ The World Bank, the European Commission, the UK Department for International Development (DfID) and UNICEF.

conformity to the international discourse surrounding education access and equity (Srivastava, 2005).

The launch in 2001 of SSA also represents a significant funding and policy commitment towards UEE on the part of government. An externally supported,¹⁷ centrally sponsored scheme, SSA has the central objective of ‘mobilising all resources, human, financial and institutional, necessary for achieving the goal of UEE’ (MHRD, 2002, p. 55). However, despite such political commitments and improvements in basic enrolment rates, SSA failed to meet the original objective of UEE by 2010. Now in Phase III of its implementation, the remit of SSA remains broad, from school construction to teacher training, and, more recently the implementation of the RtE Act, which provides ‘a justiciable legal framework’ for UEE (Mukhopadhyay & Sarangapani, in press).

In parallel, the SSA framework has also expanded over time to include partnerships with private sector and civil society organisations, in part because of donor advocacy efforts and the growth of private foundations (Colclough & De, 2010). As a result, ‘the number of NGOs working in collaboration with governments at different levels has also increased considerably’ (ibid., p. 30). In an analysis of macro-planning trends in education, Srivastava (2010) also identifies a growing trend towards PPPs in recent years (see also Fennell, 2007).¹⁸ Whilst some commentators have welcomed this approach, others have seen such policies as an attempt by government to dilute responsibility for UEE: ‘governments find it convenient to use decentralisation as a mechanism of abdication of its own responsibilities of educating the people’ (Tilak, 2007, p.3874).

Similarly, Clause 12(c) of the RtE Act, which compels all private unaided schools to reserve 25% of their places in Class I (or pre-primary, as applicable) for free for all children from Economically Weaker Status (EWS)¹⁹ and socially

¹⁷ Major funders of SSA include the World Bank, DfID, UNICEF and the European CommissionEC.

¹⁸ Discussed in section 2.3.1.

¹⁹ A policy term used to refer to citizens or households with an income below a certain threshold level. There is no set definition for EWS at the national level; in Delhi, for RtE Act admissions, EWS is defined as a household with an annual income of Rs. 100,000 or below (DoE Delhi, 7 January 2011).

disadvantaged groups until they reach the end of elementary school, has proven controversial, not least in that it necessitates the allocation of state resources to private institutions, ostensibly in the name of UEE.²⁰ Furthermore, the RtE Act 25% reservation is indicative of a reframed relationship between the state and civil society, whereby the government-mandated right to free and compulsory education is exercised through parental choice via a consumer-based mode of engagement with private education providers. As I explain in the next section of this chapter, this contention that the right to education be realised through engagement with the private sector should be understood within the context of long-term state failure to achieve UEE, which I argue is itself a key explanatory factor for private sector growth in India.

2.2.4 The continued failure to achieve UEE

In 2015, India was described by Aaron Benavot, a senior UNESCO official, as having made ‘exemplary progress’ towards achieving access to education for all (UNESCO, 9 April 2015, para. 17), with recent data indicating that India is the only country in South and West Asia to have an equal ratio of girls to boys in both primary and secondary education (UNESCO, 2015a). However, whilst the proportion of out-of-school children is estimated to have fallen to 6.4% and 5.4% for lower and upper primary school aged children respectively (UNICEF, 2014), this still equates to an estimated 11.9 million children aged between 6 and 14 who are not in school.

Furthermore, existing data has illuminated huge regional and social disparities regarding enrolment, attendance and completion rates between and within states. According to data drawn from India’s Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), primary school enrolment and completion rates were close to 100% in Kerala and Himachal Pradesh in 2006, whereas in Bihar, for example, 36% of children aged

²⁰ Under the terms of the RtE Act, private schools are to be reimbursed for each child enrolled under the provision at the level of state expenditure per child or tuition fee charged at the school, whichever is less. In Delhi, this amount is fixed at a maximum of Rs. 1,190 per child per month (Government of NCT of Delhi, 2013).

7 to 14 were estimated as being out of school (Education Policy and Data Centre, 2013). In addition, social factors have an impact on exclusion rates: the average rate of exclusion from lower primary school-age children from SC groups is 5.6% compared to the national average of 3.6% (UNICEF, 2014). Children from Muslim, SC and ST communities also account for 67% of India's out-of-school children, despite making up only 40% of the child population (ibid.), with girls from such communities living in rural areas the most likely to be out of school.

Aside from basic enrolment figures, Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) data suggest that learning levels remain low, with a little over half of all children in Class V unable to read a Class II text (Pratham, 2016). Average attendance rates were also found to be relatively low at 71% nationally, varying between close to 100% in Kerala and between 50-59% across Bihar (ibid.). Thus, existing data suggests that entrenched social and economic inequalities remain substantial barriers to accessing quality education.

When considering the failure of the government to achieve UEE within anything like the time frame specified within the Indian Constitution, commentators have suggested that UEE has persisted in policy discourse for its rhetorical effect rather than because of political will for its fulfilment:

[Post-Independence] the government did open new primary schools at a rapid pace, but failed to care for the material and pedagogical conditions prevailing in them. Once the 'basic education' experiment was over in all but name in most states by the mid-1960s there was no perspective left in primary education to stop it from drifting. Expansion continued, for it testified to the government's commitment to the Constitution, but there was no idea or method to make universal elementary education a coherent project.

(Kumar, 2005, p. 194)

The apparent political ambivalence towards mass education throughout the post-Independence period is reflected in empirical research from this time that illustrates differing enrolment patterns between social classes and the preference for English-medium, private education by upper and upper middle-class households (Kamat, 1985; Upadhyay, 1997). This pattern of educational segregation was noted by the

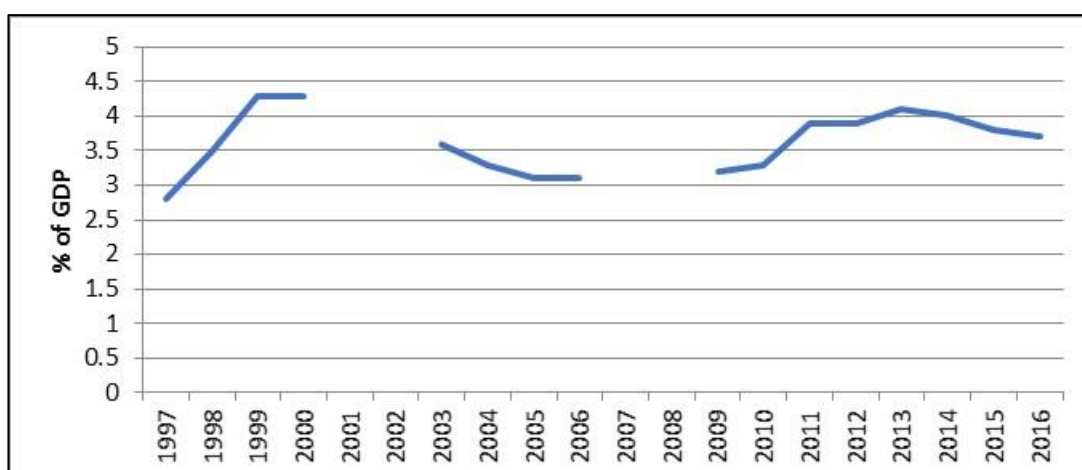
Kothari Commission (1964), which drew attention to elite flight from the government sector:

There is this segregation in education itself - the minority of private fee-charging, better schools meeting the need of the upper classes and the vast bulk of free, publicly maintained, but poor schools being utilised by the rest. What is worse, this segregation is increasing and tending to widen the gulf between the [elite] classes and the masses.
(Vol.1, p. 72)

As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, more recent studies of India's 'new' middle classes have illuminated the significance of English-medium education as a marker of social prestige and a corresponding drive for private school enrolment (Donner, 2005; Fernandes, 2006; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008, 2009; Sancho, 2015). Equally, increasing migration of the upper and middle classes away from the government schooling system has resulted in what some have argued is a lack of resolve by policy-makers to tackle quality challenges across the government school education system (Srivastava & Noronha, 2014).

In line with what some have seen as the neglect of the state education sector on the part of government, others have pointed to a consistent pattern of underinvestment in education, despite apparent political commitments to the contrary (Tilak, 2010; Srivastava, 2014). Indeed, despite the recommendation of the Kothari Commission (1964) that 6% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) be reserved for public spending in education, expenditure has increased at a slow rate. Reaching 4.3% in 1999, more recent years have seen budget cuts in education and other social services; in 2016, planned expenditure on education was only 3.7% of GDP, a fall of 0.3% from 2014.

Figure 2.1 National spending on education as a % of GDP, 1997 – 2015



Source: World Bank. Data not available for 2001, 2002, 2007 and 2008.

Consistent with falling budgetary commitments, Srivastava & Noronha (2014) identify a practice of deliberate underestimation of initial budget estimates for the implementation of the RtE Act. Critically, ‘interviewees involved in background drafting processes and in direct implementation of the Act were not convinced that this was in response to genuine resource constraints’ (Srivastava & Noronha, 2014, p. 4), but rather to ensure that the Act was more ‘palatable’ (ibid.) to government officials. Indeed, while the government has blamed lack of finances for the continued underinvestment in education (Verger & VanderKaaij, 2012), this is hard to justify in the face of India’s economic growth in recent years. This has led some commentators to conclude that although successive FYPs continue to reference UEE as an important policy objective falling budgetary allocations ‘cast doubt on the political will to spend enough money on elementary education’ (Dyer, 2000, p. 20; also Rao, 2002; Kumar, 2008; Tilak, 2010; Srivastava, 2014).

Falling budgetary commitments are even more significant given substantial growth in the private education sector in recent years. Under resourcing has been cited by some commentators as a key factor driving private sector enrolment, as parents withdraw their children from poorly maintained and understaffed government schools in pursuit of supposedly higher quality education in the private sector (Tooley & Dixon, 2003). This has been termed ‘de facto privatisation’, whereby the growth of the private sector has arisen because of parental demand

rather than government intervention (Tooley & Dixon, 2006). This interpretation is supported by the PROBE team (1999), who argue that the presence of poor quality government schooling helps to explain the increased popularity of private education in some regions of the country:

In rural Himachal Pradesh [...] there is a good deal of purchasing power, but the government schools function well, so there are few private schools. In central Bihar, by contrast, poverty is endemic, yet private schools can be found in many villages due to the dysfunctional state of government schools.

(p. 102)

The scarcity of resources argument has also been cited as a rationale for government support of private institutions. For example, Jain & Dholakia (2009) argue that, even if GDP allocations to education are increased, the government simply cannot afford UEE without private sector provision. In the past, this position has been upheld by the Ministry of Finance (2010) with respect to private sector involvement in the implementation of the RtE Act: 'Innovative models are necessary considering the fact that Government resources may themselves be insufficient and need to be supplemented' (p. 52). Indeed, Srivastava & Noronha (2014) point out that the planned underfinancing of the RtE Act was guided by the presumption that the private sector would be able to meet additional capacity. However, whether private institutions can ensure equitable access to quality education remains questionable considering socio-economic barriers that have been shown to impact on private school enrolment, as well as enduring questions surrounding their quality. These and other issues concerning the social justice implications of increasing privatisation and marketisation are addressed in detail in Chapter 3. As background to this discussion and to establish the implications of such political-economic shifts for the role of the family and the state within what may be conceptualised as an increasingly marketised elementary education system, the next part of this chapter outlines the growth of private education in India in recent years before moving on to examine growing political support for public-private partnerships in education and several 'grey areas' in government policies concerning the private sector.

2.3 The education market: the growth of the private sector

Broadly speaking, school institutions may be divided into three categories in India: government, unaided private and private aided. Although there are nuances across these typologies, government schools are those funded and managed entirely by government agencies. Unaided private schools are those that do not receive government funding and are privately managed. Private aided schools are managed by private organisations, but receive government funding for teacher salaries and do not charge fees up to Class VIII (Kingdon, 2007; 2017).²¹ Technically, all private schools (i.e. aided and unaided) should be non-profit (Härmä, 2011), but empirical research has indicated that this is not enforced consistently within the unaided sector (Tooley & Dixon, 2003; Srivastava, 2007).

High fee, private unaided institutions have long been the preserve of the social elite in India (Nambissan, 2010). However, the last twenty years have seen a dramatic growth in the unaided private sector that extends to less wealthy sections of society. Sometimes referred to as low cost private schools, affordable private schools, budget private schools, non-elite schools and teaching shops, a common term used today is low fee private (LFP) schools, as coined by Srivastava (2008). However, it should be noted that, while Srivastava (2008) operationalises LFP schools at the elementary level as those charging a maximum monthly fee of about one day's wages of a daily labourer, there remains a lack of consensus across the academic literature as to what constitutes 'low fee' (Day Ashley et al., 2015). Heyneman & Stern (2013), for example, differ from Srivastava (2008) in defining a low fee school as one whose tuition is lower than half the minimum wage. Others, such as Tooley (2015), draw on Lewin's (2007) conclusion that 10% of earnings is the maximum amount that can be spent on schooling in a family and considered affordable, using this to define which schools are accessible to households living on or below the poverty line. Within the Indian context, Singh & Bangay (2014) further characterise

²¹ Such schools are also referred to as government-aided or simply 'aided' within the wider literature (Kingdon, 2017).

LFP schools as ‘small often family run enterprises which cater for the poor and are dependent on fees for their operation’ (p. 134) and, within Andhra Pradesh, as having fees ranging between \$1 and \$10 per month (~Rs. 61 – 610).²²

Despite this lack of consensus regarding what counts as a LFP school, it is accepted that there has been a dramatic growth in private schooling across India since 2000. For example, while not distinguishing between aided and unaided private schools, recent ASER data indicate that around 31% of children age 6-14 in rural areas are attending private schools, an increase of 12% from 2006 (Pratham, 2016).²³ Similarly, the Young Lives longitudinal survey in Andhra Pradesh found that private school enrolment amongst the study cohort doubled from 22% in 2002 to 44% in 2009 (Woodhead et al., 2013).²⁴

However, it is important to note that absolute levels of unaided private school enrolment remain difficult to discern, in part because government data have failed to capture enrolment at unrecognised institutions (Kingdon, 2017). The size of the unrecognised sector is likely to be significant. For example, Tooley et al. (2007) found that of the 65% of children accessing unaided private schools across study sites in Hyderabad, 23% were enrolled in unrecognised schools. Similarly, one large-scale school survey across 20 Indian states identified that 51% of all unaided private, rural primary schools were unrecognised (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008).

Capturing enrolment levels across all unaided private schools (i.e. recognised and unrecognised), 2014-2015 National Sample Survey (NSS) household survey data indicate relatively high rates of enrolment at the national level, although with significant differences between rural and urban areas (Table 2.2). Enrolment also appears to be concentrated at the lower primary stage, as in Delhi, although data indicate an increase in enrolment at the secondary level in rural areas.

²² Source: OECD data.

²³ While numbers vary between states, the total proportion of private aided schools in India was 5.2% in 2011-12 (NUEPA, 2013).

²⁴ The Young Lives data also does not distinguish between aided and unaided private schools. In 2013, private aided schools made up only 3.1% of schools in Andhra Pradesh compared to 24.2% for private unaided schools (James & Woodhead, 2014).

Table 2.2 Percentage of children in private unaided schools, 2014-2015

School stage	All-India		Delhi
	Rural	Urban	Urban
Lower primary	20.8	48.9	33.6
Upper primary	17.5	40.7	28.6
Secondary	24.5	36.1	23.1
Total	20.8	42.1	28.8

Source: Kingdon (2017) using NSS household survey data.

In seeking to contextualise the growth of private provision across the country, Sarangapani & Mukhopadhyay (in press) argue that socio-economic transitions within the country, an aspiring middle class, and the increasing social distance between government school teachers and families, have contributed to the desirability of private institutions and a simultaneous reinforcement of deficit assumptions regarding government schools: ‘a stereotyping of the “culture” of government schools as being marked by distance, apathy, dysfunction and neglect has acquired widespread, uncritical, circulation’ (see also Chopra & Jeffrey, 2005; Sancho, 2015). Nambissan (2014) further posits that policy interventions targeting disadvantaged groups under DPEP and SSA have served to increased stratification within the public education system by establishing informal education centres and encouraging the employment of ‘para’ teachers alongside ‘regular’ government school teachers,²⁵ reinforcing narratives of government sectoral failure.

Government policy discourses have also served to reinforce a common perception of government school failure in other ways. The NPE 1986, for example, frames the state of the government school sector as overwhelmed by problems of poor quality: ‘problems of access, quality, quantity, utility and financial outlay, accumulated over the years, have now assumed such massive proportions that they must be tackled with the utmost urgency’ (MHRD, 1998, p. 2). Without dismissing the challenges facing the government schooling sector, ‘solutions’ in the form of recent policy initiatives designed to facilitate private school access and enhance

²⁵ Sometimes referred to as contract teachers, para teachers are hired at the school level (i.e. are not civil service employees), typically have no formal teacher training, and are paid considerably less than regular government teachers (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2013).

parental choice have also contributed to generalised perceptions of the superiority of private schooling based on inconsistent empirical evidence, an issue that I return to in Chapter 3. For example, the RtE Act 25% reservation has been criticised for framing the private sector as inherently more desirable than the government system (Ramachandran, 2009). As other commentators have cautioned, there is a danger that ‘culturally hegemonic language around the failure of government schools’ (Subrahmanian, 2006, p. 69) and the pupils within them becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011, p. 25).

The creation of parallel structures within the government school system, including the Kendriya Vidyalayas (KV)²⁶ and the academically selective Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas (RPVV) in Delhi, are also suggestive of the accepted failure of mainstream government schools and the pupils within them: ‘It is common knowledge that bright students from poor families are unable to realise their full potential because [a] spirit of competition does not exist when they compete with mediocre students’ (DoE Delhi, n.d., para. 9 under ‘Welfare Schemes’). The superior facilities that may be found within such selective government schools, as Juneja (2010) describes, have also served to foster hierarchies in the government system:

These [RPVV] schools are resourced differently from the normal government secondary schools. Their class sizes are strictly governed by an upper limit of 30. Their teachers are some of the best teachers from government schools, and the students are set apart in a uniform that distinguishes them from other students in government schools.
(p. 21)

Further reinforcing notions of the intrinsic superiority of private institutions through explicit mimicry, the Delhi government also established the Sarvodaya Vidyalayas (SV) with the aim to provide: ‘quality education to the children from class I to XII, under one roof as is being provided in the private public schools’ (DoE Delhi, n.d., para. 2 under ‘Welfare Schemes’). While not academically selective, SVs have proven so popular that admissions are now run using a lottery system (Juneja, 2010),

²⁶ KVs were established for the children of Army and central government employees and are selective in the sense that such children are prioritised in school admissions. See Appendix G for an overview of key school types in Delhi.

promoting both a sense of exclusivity and embedding competition for school admissions within the 'mainstream' government sector.

Thus, while the growth of private provision in India is substantial, the apparent demand for private schooling needs to be contextualised within policy discourses at both central and state levels that have reinforced deficit assumptions about government schooling, as well as within reforms that have fostered new hierarchies between government schools. As will be discussed in the following section, this also includes discourses surrounding public-private partnerships (PPPs) that frame the private sector as more efficient and effective than state provision.

2.3.1 Public-private partnerships

PPPs in education in India are not a recent phenomenon, the private aided school model dating back to the colonial era pre-Independence.²⁷ However, it is only in more recent years that PPPs have emerged as a discernable policy trend, primarily as a strategy for sectoral quality improvement within the context of hegemonic acceptance of failure within the government system:

[T]he private sector will be able to enhance efficiency in these areas and can bring professionalism [to] the system. [...] Because of efficiency and competition, the cost of operation is expected to be much lower than in [a] government set up.

(Government of India [GoI] unpublished report; cited in Verger & VanderKaaij, 2012, p. 256)

The policy rhetoric surrounding PPPs is softened in other policy documents, such as the *Report of the Working Group on Private Sector Participation including PPP in School Education*, which acknowledges quality issues across the entire education system: 'Quality of education remains a major issue in *all* types of schools' (MHRD, 2011b, p. 13)' and '[the] private sector is considered to be synonymous with efficiency, good governance, expertise, results and quality. This needs to be evidence based rather than a general 'given' and / or impressionistic' (ibid., p. 19).

²⁷ See footnote 6 (p. 28) for clarification.

Despite this, the report goes on to argue in favour of the government exploring PPPs in school education in India, citing diversification of school operators as desirable in the pursuit of quality improvements:

A well-designed PPP, can, among others: Better achieve the desired outcomes in the education sector [...] Broaden the number and scope of players in the education sector, spurring greater efficiency, effectiveness, and innovations.

(ibid., p. 25)

While I address the broad rationale for a market-orientation of public services in Chapter 3, it is important to note at this juncture the transnational nature of development reforms in education and the increasing tendency towards privatisation in and of education in many national contexts. Informed by neoliberal principles of ‘small state-free market’ (Ball & Youdell, 2007, p. 12), this includes an emphasis on parental choice, school effectiveness, and the associated introduction of various forms of public-private partnerships in educational management and delivery. While interpreted and translated into educational policy and practice in diverse ways, privatisation has emerged as a ‘common sense’ approach for the reorganisation of public service provision within many countries (Ball, 2007; Rizvi, 2016). The emphasis on effectiveness and efficiency of PPPs within policy discourses in India should thus be understood within the broader context of global political influences and the promotional policy work of international organisations and donor agencies (Rutkowski, 2006; Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Nambissan, 2014). Indeed, echoing what others have noted regarding the influence of international agencies on national level policy making (De Grauwe, 2005; Channa, 2015), Robertson & Verger (2012) point to the rising focus on ‘partnerships’ by multilateral and bilateral organisations such as the World Bank, DFID and USAID from the 1990s onwards. Such influences should be understood as associated with financial incentives, Rizvi (2016) noting that donor aid to low-income countries may be accompanied by conditions that require governments to engage with such ‘partnership’ approaches.

The specificities of education PPP reforms in India reflect the ‘enigmatic’ qualities of PPPs that Robertson & Verger (2012) identify in other contexts. In

particular, while the 10th FYP posits that the private sector has a role to play in achieving UEE and encourages ‘more collaborative efforts with the private sector and expansion of the role of private initiatives’ (Planning Commission, 2002, Vol 2., p. 39) and work in ‘the PPP mode’ is referred to repeatedly through the 11th FYP (Planning Commission, 2008), there is little clarity as to what this means in practice (Srivastava, 2010). The impact at the more local level of the shifting relationship between the state and the private sector, and by turn to parental decision-making within this context, thus remains opaque.

One discernible PPP strategy at the elementary level is found in the proposal to establish 6,000 new secondary schools across India, termed ‘model schools’, 2,500 of which would be under a PPP, though again the implementation of this strategy remains opaque.²⁸ In addition to this, and no doubt encouraged by pro-PPP rhetoric within macro-planning documents, private operated-government funded PPP models are currently being explored in several municipalities and States. This includes the South Delhi Municipal Corporation (SDMC), which announced in 2014 that it would be turning over the management of an unspecified number of schools at the lower primary level to private operators (Shekhar, 22 September 2014).²⁹ While details of the formal agreement between the SDMC and private operators have not been made public, such PPP models imply a movement of the state away from direct responsibility for educational delivery and new demands on families to engage in ‘school choice’, an issue I return to later in this chapter. At the same time, considerable ‘grey areas’ in legislation and policy discourses concerning the private sector contribute to the formation of an increasingly complex market landscape which parents are expected to navigate. These grey areas also indicate the lack of clarity as to the role of the state in the fulfillment of UEE in practice.

²⁸ In April 2016, MHRD announced that the PPP model school scheme was under review and that the selection process for school operators had been cancelled (MHRD, 3 April 2016).

²⁹ The first such PPP school launched in 2015 and, in 2018, remains limited to a handful of schools.

2.3.2 Government policy and the private sector: grey areas

The growing momentum for education PPPs in a school operator mode has proven controversial amongst policy commentators. While Verger & VanderKaaij (2012) state that PPPs are generally viewed as ‘a lesser evil’ (p. 258), others argue that the lack of clear regulation risks schools gaining recognition from government without adhering to prescribed quality norms (Srivastava, 2010; Nambissan, 2014). The presence of profit-making schools, which are prevalent across the country despite this being technically illegal under the RtE Act, also calls into question the capacity of government to act as an effective regulator of new or existing school operators within the market. Indeed, despite the ratification of the RtE Act, which details strict quality standards for school operators, albeit restricted to infrastructure rather than processes or outcomes, central government has openly encouraged state governments to be ‘flexible’ in enforcing legislation concerning private providers:

Private providers (including NGOs and non-profits) can play an important role in elementary education. Their ***legitimate role in expanding elementary education needs to be recognised and a flexible approach*** needs to be adopted to encourage them to invest in the sector. The current ***licensing and regulatory restrictions in the sector could be eased*** and a single window approach should be adopted so that the process of opening new schools by private providers is streamlined. It is also important that the ***regulations be flexible and context-dependent*** — care needs to be taken so that schools that are serving disadvantaged populations effectively do not get shut down. A few States have already adopted a more ***flexible approach*** in this regard in framing State rules. In all, private players would be encouraged to set up more schools, provided they are committed to, and held accountable for, providing high-quality education and are transparent in their operations.

[my emphasis] (Planning Commission, 2013, Vol. 3, p. 64)

The encouragement for state governments to be accommodating towards the private sector leaves considerable room for interpretation. Providers should be ‘committed to...high quality’ and ‘transparent in their operations’, but how and to whom private providers should be held to account is not specified, nor is a definition of quality provided. This is of concern given that ‘schools serving disadvantaged

populations’ are specified in the context of an encouragement towards a ‘flexible approach’ regarding regulatory processes and associated quality norms. This encouragement of flexibility in the enforcement of legislation is echoed in the SSA framework for the RtE Act implementation:

(vi) *Moral compulsion* is imposed through the RtE Act on parents, teachers, educational administrators and other stakeholders. Rather than shifting emphasis on punitive processes, the Committee has abided by this general tenor of the Act.

[emphasis in original] (MHRD, 2011a, p. 6)

That the enforcement of the RtE Act is described as a ‘moral compulsion’ seems at odds with the judicial legislative framework that the RtE Act is designed to be, and once again serves to foster ambiguity surrounding to whom or what the moral compulsion is directed. It is also unclear what recourse parents may have if schools fail to conform to regulatory and quality norms when the legal demands on providers from the state are framed in deliberately vague terms.

Indeed, despite the RtE Act and the Supreme Court judgement that upheld it in 2012, the existing evidence suggests that implementation of the RtE Act is its own grey area in terms of implementation at the school level. This includes media reports of large-scale corruption in Delhi surrounding the award of seats under the RtE Act 25% reservation (Ojha, 24 June 2015) and recent research that presents evidence that some schools are knowingly flouting various terms of the RtE Act with apparent impunity (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). A local news report in 2015 also suggested that one NGO-run chain of unrecognised schools in Delhi was considering rebranding their schools as ‘tuition centres’ to avoid falling under the purview of the RtE Act, whilst still openly operating for all intents and purposes as schools (Divya, 10 May 2015). That other private schools may follow suit undermines the capacity of the RtE Act to fulfil its central purpose of ensuring equitable access to quality education for every child and highlights the uncertain role of private tuition services within current legislation.

2.3.3 Private tuitions: another grey area

Currently, teachers within the government system are prohibited from being employed as tutors or delivering any tuition services on their own time outside of school (GoI, 2009). However, there is no other legislation that otherwise regulates tuition services in terms of who may establish a tuition centre or any processes for formal accreditation. This legislative gap is significant given the substantial increase in children accessing private tuition services in recent years (Sujatha, 2014). At the national level, Azam (2015) finds that in 2007-2008, 13.45% and 19.94% of students were reported as accessing private tutoring at the lower and upper primary stages respectively. However, rates of private tuition appear to vary between states, with one education survey across West Bengal identifying that 64% of children attending primary school were also attending private tuition classes (Rana et al., 2009).

In addition to inequalities of enrolment by gender and caste (Azam, 2015), some commentators have raised concerns about the impact of private tuition classes on children's wellbeing, fearing that much tuition focuses on exam coaching at the expense of quality teaching and learning: '[private tutoring] does not sharpen their analytical abilities, but rather numbs their curiosity by repeating the same drill of memorisation and regurgitation' (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011, p. 116). Apprehension has also been expressed about the possibility that private tuition, as a further expense for parents, risks increasing social segregation: 'private tuition divides [the] student population into haves and have-nots' (Sen, 2009, p. 14). Similarly, Majumdar (2014) notes the poor quality of education in some coaching classes in West Bengal and points to the capacity for the growth of tuition services to entrench existing social disadvantages:

It is perhaps not wide off the mark to assume that parents of these tutees are not quite aware of the poor quality of the educational inputs their children are receiving from their paid private tutors [...] Consequently, the social gradient between knows and know-nots persists and perhaps even widens.

(p. 14)

However, despite quality and equity concerns, private tuition remains largely unaddressed by government policy or regulation.

To gain insights into the consequences of marketisation for social equality, it is important to analyse how parents navigate education markets in the context of such ‘grey areas’. It is also necessary to explore areas of tension or in some cases policy paradoxes in how parents are framed within policy texts. Thus, it is to how parents are situated within the wider education policy discourse that this chapter now turns.

2.4 Parents within policy discourses

As already touched upon earlier in this chapter, policy reforms at the national level in India reflect a reframed relationship between parents and the state, and an increasing focus on parents as key agents in the realisation of UEE. This represents a shift away from the post-Independence era where parents were either largely absent from policy discourses (NPE 1968, for example, contains no direct reference to parents) or framed as subjects for reform (see section 2.2.2). In more recent years, while there remains a persistence in notions of irresponsibility centring on lower income parents, there has been an increasing focus on parents as significant actors in the realisation of UEE via ‘choice’.

2.4.1 Parental rights and responsibilities

The 86th Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 2002 was significant in establishing free and compulsory education as a fundamental right for all children between the ages of six and fourteen years:

The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, *by law*, determine.

[emphasis in original] (Constitution of India, Article 21a)

As Juneja (2003) notes, framing education as ‘compulsory’ implies an active role on

behalf of government to ensure that this right is fulfilled. However, the Amendment Act was also significant for its addition of a new Fundamental Duty³⁰ to the Constitution with respect to the responsibilities of parents:

(k): [Parents/Guardians are] to provide opportunities for education to his child or ward between the age of six and fourteen years.

(Constitution of India, Article 51a)

Thus, under the Constitution, education is framed as a shared responsibility between government and parents. Significantly, the onus on parents is to provide opportunities for education, rather than specifying enrolment in a formal schooling setting. Moreover, the Fundamental Duties do not hold any legal authority in case of non-compliance. In other words, there is no legal responsibility for parents to enrol their child in school or to provide access to other formal education services.

As outlined earlier in this chapter, there has been a discernible trend towards decentralisation of policy implementation, monitoring and management in school education over the last 20 years. The PPP Sub-Group on Social Sector, part of the Working Group on PPPs established by the Prime Minister's Office in 2002 and tasked with exploring the feasibility of PPPs in areas including elementary education (Srivastava, 2010), thus emphasises PPPs as playing a role in community empowerment in the face of unwieldy and ineffective government provided services: 'its origin[s] in the general distrust of bureaucracy and the oppressiveness of state. Involvement of community, family, neighborhoods and voluntary organisations under PPP is observed to have led to empowerment of citizens' (Planning Commission 2004, p. 3). However, in addition to political rhetoric that stresses PPPs as a means for citizens to hold government institutions to account, citizens are also refigured as 'customers', with PPPs framed as leading to a 'clear customer focus' within social service delivery (Planning Commission, 2004, p. 5).

This framing of parents as both citizens and consumers is significant for accountability processes. As the Fundamental Duties under the Indian Constitution

³⁰ Introduced to the Indian Constitution in 1976, Fundamental Duties specify the responsibilities of all citizens and include areas such as cultural preservation and safeguarding property.

suggest, citizenship implies a sense of moral obligation to one's fellow citizens to pursue a jointly defined 'public interest' (Clarke, Newman, Smith, Vidler, & Westmarland, 2007). By contrast, the role of consumer implies a personal interest and associated action within a marketplace for the benefit of the consumer as an individual (ibid.). The extent to which citizen interests may become marginalised within a general policy trend towards a marketised, consumer-based model of education provision has implications for wider questions of social equality. Indeed, Rizvi (2016) argues that such a model may serve to undermine a sense of collective social responsibility for education, whereby 'citizens are rendered as investors and consumers, and not as members of a polity who share certain common traditions, spaces and experiences' (p. 5). This new demand on parents to act as 'consumer-citizens' vis a vis elementary education, and key tensions in this respect, are to where this chapter now turns.

2.4.2 Parents as consumer-citizens

The recent policy strategy in India, as in many other countries across the world, of seeking to advance quality improvement through market-based reforms is reliant upon parents adopting consumer behaviours as schools compete to attract potential 'clients'. However, despite reforms that have included PPPs and the diversification of government provision, and in contrast to political discourse in other national settings, such as England where Reay (2008) identifies a 'constant rhetoric around choice' (p. 639), the 12th FYP contains the first explicit reference to parental choice as a means of contributing to systemic improvements within macro-planning policy texts:

The role of the private sector in secondary schooling can be further strengthened through right policies, proper regulation, innovative public-private partnerships and a variety of demand-side financing measures that improve accountability and **enhance parental choice**, thereby achieving all three objectives of access, quality and equity in secondary education

[my emphasis] (Planning Commission, 2013,
Vol. 3, p. 73)

Reflecting the shift in policy discourses of ‘participation’ from the collective to an increasingly individualised engagement between citizens and the state via parental choice, there is thus an implied onus on parents to choose in order to fulfil societal educational objectives. At the same time, the role of the private sector is further legitimised as necessary in this pursuit.

The RtE Act 25% reservation is the central example of targeted policy action attempting to enhance parental choice at the elementary stage by exempting lower income parents from paying fees and compelling private providers to accept children from EWS and otherwise disadvantaged households under the quota. The introduction of a choice policy under a rights based legislative framework, effectively enshrining the ‘right to choose’ in the fulfilment of UEE, reflects what Lukose (2010) and others have pointed to as the merging of the private citizen and private consumer in the negotiation of public life: ‘Increasingly, forms of consumer citizenship in the era of liberalisation articulate the citizen through the notion of the right to consume, a right that must be protected through state action’ (p. 8; see also Fernandes, 2006). However, how parents may be enacting modes of consumer citizenship in education, and more particularly how school choice is reconfiguring the politics of social membership, remains an emerging area for research.

Equally, emerging empirical evidence indicates that the reality of the 25% reservation at the local level appears to be quite different from the policy intention, with evidence of wealthier parents paying for forged documents to secure a free seat (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016) and many free seats apparently being left unfilled in several areas across the country; between 2011 and 2016, 38% of school places for EWS and disadvantaged children under the RtE Act were left vacant in Delhi (Comptroller Auditor General, 2017). Given varying degrees of knowledge of the RtE Act amongst parents (Mehendale et al., 2015; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016), households with comparatively more ‘know how’ may be better able to adopt consumer behaviours within the education market and thus gain an advantage over the most disenfranchised families. Thus, the exercising of consumer citizenship via choice has the potential to undermine collective goals concerning UEE and to

consolidate existing socioeconomic hierarchies. As I elaborate in the following section, stereotyping of 'RtE children' and their parents is another practice associated with the enactment of the RtE Act that is in tension with UEE policy objectives.

2.4.3 Negative stereotyping

The 25% reservation under the RtE Act represents an apparent attempt by government to foster inclusion in education (Mehendale et al., 2015). However, negative stereotyping of children from lower income and marginalised groups is a recognisable element in some of the public and policy commentary surrounding the RtE Act. For example, one industry-led consultancy report on the impact of the RtE Act 25% reservation reflects a wider societal perception of 'RtE children' as undermining good behaviour in private schools:

Discipline is almost eroded in schools. Children coming from the EWS category use abusive language and have no proper etiquette. This impacts the mainstream children.

(Confederation of Indian Industry - KPMG, 2016, p. 18)

Empirical research in schools has also drawn attention to teachers' deficit constructions of children from lower income and marginalised groups:

There is a perception that "RTE children" come from deficient backgrounds, and hence the role of schools and teachers should be to help the child leave their bad habits and adjust to new sophisticated surroundings.

(Mehendale et al., 2015, p. 49)

In addition, there are differences in how parents are framed within policy texts emanating from different levels of government that, in some instances, reflect wider societal stereotyping of lower income parents. Whilst in macro-planning documents, community empowerment is presented positively and indeed as essential to systemic quality improvements (see section 2.2.2), the *Report of the Review Committee on the Delhi School Education Act and Rules, 1973* (DoE Delhi,

2012) undermines such policy rhetoric by reporting parental ‘voice’ as at least partially to blame for falling standards in schools:

It was also alleged [by representatives from both government and private schools] that an atmosphere of fault finding has been generated among parents. Upbraiding indulged in by some NGOs and issue of notices by DCPCR [Delhi Commission for the Protection of Child Rights] has further emboldened parents and children to challenge authority. This was affecting even those children who are otherwise disciplined. This sudden change of ethos and expectations was militating against an atmosphere where good conduct, diligence and high performance were once rewarded.

(DoE Delhi, 2012, p. 66)

In this interpretation, parents are emboldened rather than empowered, are challenging authority and ‘fault finding’ rather than exercising their parental rights, and civil society organisations are indulgent rather than motivational. The framing of parents as of a lower social status than school authorities is clearly implied in the suggestion that power relations have now shifted whereby parents are challenging school authorities directly, which, it is suggested, has not always been the case. The negative representation of parents is also apparent later in the report:

Rule 141 of the existing Act provides for admission up to Class VIII on the basis of affidavit in respect of children who have not studied in a recognised school. This serves the interest of the **ignorant parents** who admit their children in unrecognised [private unaided] schools but later they face problems.

[my emphasis] (ibid., p. 103)

This framing of parents as ‘ignorant’ regarding enrolment in unrecognised schools is significant in several ways. Firstly, it seems to be assumed that the government should not be held responsible for the enforcement of legislation concerning school recognition, but that parents should assume responsibility for identifying the legal status of a school correctly.³¹ This does not account for the possibility that unrecognised schools may falsely advertise themselves as recognised. Some schools

³¹ The RtE Act also does not provide clarification as to whether government or parents should be held responsible for the consequences of non-recognition in terms of access to later stages of education (Gol, 2009)

may also be recognised until Class V, but operate until Class VIII and above, information that is likely deliberately concealed from parents. These issues were all identified during fieldwork as part of this research study and anecdotal evidence suggests that they are not unfamiliar in other parts of India. Secondly, given that parents accessing unrecognised schools are more likely to be of lower income, the characterisation of parents as ‘ignorant’ plays into a damaging stereotype of such households being irresponsible and neglectful of their children’s needs.

As Srivastava (2005) notes, the negative stereotyping of lower income parents ‘not knowing any better’ in their schooling choices has led to a lack of research focus on processes of school choice concerning the growth of the private sector. Challenging this interpretation, Srivastava (2008) characterises parents who have chosen to send their children to private schools as ‘active choosers’, who gather market information from a range of sources to evaluate their schooling options. Whilst this would seem to support policy rhetoric concerning choice as a means for improving quality across the system, as parents select the ‘best’ schools and the ‘worst’ close through lack of custom, there remains a gap in the literature concerning how parents evaluate the various and increasingly diverse schooling options that are available. In addition, the choice processes of parents who do not access the private sector, framed as having no choice by virtue of accessing the increasingly denigrated government sector, or indeed the practices and perspectives of those who may have opted out of the formal school system altogether, remain significant gaps within the research literature.

2.5 Conclusion

In line with global political discourses concerning how public services are best delivered, the post-Independence period in India has seen a national policy trend towards the centralisation of decision-making in education, the decentralisation of responsibility for oversight and policy implementation and, more recently, the promotion of parental ‘participation’ through choice. However, the remaking of the relationship between the state and citizens via policies of school choice and the

expansion of private provision, now increasingly framed as part of the 'solution' to achieving UEE, has been accompanied by a lack of clarity as to where regulatory responsibility for UEE lies, and other significant 'grey areas' in legislation and policy implementation. The absence of a uniform 'state' in education, intensified within Delhi, further illustrates the complexity and increasing diversity within the contemporary education landscape that has served to undermine collective efforts concerning UEE. The growth of private schooling, in particular, needs to be understood in the context of consistent government underspending, the deliberate fostering of hierarchies between schools, as exemplified in Delhi, and 'discourses of derision' (Ball, 1990) surrounding government provision and lower income households evident in national and class distinctions.

'Choice' reforms indicate new responsibilities for parents not just to choose a school, but to choose well to ensure quality education for their own children and at the societal level to fulfil UEE objectives. However, because very little is known about how parents themselves understand and negotiate their role as consumer-citizens within India's increasingly marketised system, it is unclear whether 'choice' reforms will work as policy makers predict. Indeed, the uneven implementation of the RtE Act 25% reservation in Delhi, as elsewhere in India, indicates that inequalities of school access are unlikely to be disrupted by this particular scheme. Hence, the focus of the empirical chapters of this thesis on how households understand and negotiate the choice landscape. But first an examination of the theoretical perspectives underlying 'choice' reforms and a review of the available empirical evidence concerning the negotiation of choice in practice by lower income households is needed. This is the focus of the next chapter of this thesis.

CHAPTER 3

EDUCATION MARKETS AND PARENTAL CHOICE

A Review of Key Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the increasing privatisation and marketisation of the school education landscape in India, which at a broad level has taken two forms: a ‘mushrooming’ LFP sector, and a government policy trend towards enhancing parental choice and sectoral competition. Both aspects of this market-orientation in education have been welcomed by some commentators and promoted as key mechanisms for improving quality and ‘efficiency’ across the school education sector. This chapter presents the arguments of market proponents (section 3.2) and interrogates them in light of conceptual reflections on the shortcomings of rational choice perspectives, and empirical insights from India and elsewhere that suggest that the LFP sector and choice-led policy reforms may exacerbate educational inequality (section 3.3). The final substantive section of the chapter (section 3.4) signals an alternative conceptual framework for examining parental choice within the contexts of the study settings that avoids the pitfalls of rational choice theory. This alternative framework is elaborated further in Chapter 5.

Throughout this chapter, as in the thesis more generally, I incorporate literature from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including philosophy of education, economics, sociology of education and sociology of the family, all of which I hope to demonstrate are of direct relevance to the study of parental choice. In drawing together perspectives from across these disciplines, I will build two related arguments (and in so doing to contribute to a much-needed ‘de-siloing’ of disciplinary perspectives concerning school choice and the LFP sector): firstly, that

parental choice is a socio-cultural practice that has ramifications across different social spheres (the household, the education sector, society more broadly); and, secondly, that a developed understanding of the values underpinning and outcomes of choice processes requires a more nuanced theoretical approach than is offered by the simplistic application of a rational choice model. In terms of the specific subfields of sociology drawn upon, while this study makes heavy use of the sociology of education literature, including that which has focused on the choice of specific school types (i.e. private or state sector), I also draw on sociological studies of the family in India and elsewhere to argue that a focus on the private negotiation of choice within the home in the context of changing familial dynamics within contemporary Indian society is required for a richer understanding of choice processes and hence the implications of choice policy for social equality.

3.2 Markets and education

The application of market theory to education is not a new proposition. As Forsey, Davies & Walford (2008) note, recent decades have seen the rising political influence of economic theory within a range of social sectors in many national contexts. Some have referred to this movement as the 'hegemony of economic theory' (Feigenbaum, Henig & Hamnett, 1999, p. 119), whereby economic concepts concerning the behaviour of consumers and operators have been used to argue for a move away from a 'big-government' approach towards private sector-led provision and the 'de-legitimation of the welfare state' (ibid.). This so-called pro-market ideology is what Harvey (2005) and others have identified as an essential component of neoliberalism, 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade' (p. 2). In education policy-making, neoliberalism has been associated with the introduction of market mechanisms within the public system and the contracting out of school operations to private providers (Ball, 2016; Connell, 2013a). Parental choice in particular has been championed as a 'panacea' (Chubb &

Moe, 1990) to what are presented as fundamental institutional problems with government schooling provision.

In line with this global trend, education policy in India has also seen the rise of discourses that champion private sector 'efficiency' over government provision, which has been interpreted by some as reflecting an alignment with a pro-market, neoliberal ideology (Kumar, 2010). Despite being framed under a rights agenda, the introduction of the RtE Act 25% reservation could also be understood as what Ball (2016) refers to as a form of endogenous privatisation by utilising government funds to stimulate choice and to fund access to private schools. The LFP sector, whilst not an explicit government-led phenomenon (Verger, Fontdevila & Sancajo, 2016), has been bolstered by the introduction of PPP frameworks, and has moved from being a default strategy to a 'strategy of design' championed by key actors within the international development community (Srivastava, 2010, p. 3). Examining this trend, Nambissan (2014) links recent education policy reforms in India to advocacy emanating from 'neoliberal capitalist economies' (p. 5), with other researchers pointing to the influence of supranational agencies including the World Bank, which 'champions public austerity and a reduced role for government in the provision of education' (Jones, 1998, p. 152). Nambissan & Ball (2010) also note the pro-market advocacy work undertaken by an intersecting, transnational network of philanthropists, business representatives and what they term 'policy entrepreneurs' in recent years in India and other countries across the Global South.

Given the trend towards market-led education reforms in India, the arguments for privatisation and enhanced parental choice are of central concern to an examination of such processes with respect to social equality. It is thus necessary to unpack the economic theories underlying the global trend towards education marketisation, and to examine on what basis, along with rights-based discourses centring on freedom of choice, these theoretical approaches have informed education reforms in India and elsewhere.

3.2.1 Market competition

Like other academic disciplines within the social sciences, economics is not a unified field of study, but comprises various schools of thought. Throughout this chapter, I focus on key theoretical assumptions associated with both neoclassical and Austrian economics that have been drawn upon to support arguments for a market driven approach to education provision.³² While an in-depth exploration of these two schools and the differences between them is beyond the scope of this thesis, I will draw attention to significant theoretical divergences relating to education market functionality.

Many of the arguments for market-based reforms in education rest on the case against a monopoly market arrangement, whereby only one firm or vendor is available to consumers (Black, Hashimsade & Myles, 2012). In a market for private goods or services, a monopoly is understood as undesirable from a consumer perspective, as the single vendor sets prices irrespective of the quality of the service or goods. Thus, it is proposed that monopolies are more likely to lead to cost inefficiencies, as the single vendor will lack the incentive to maximise profits via resource efficiencies and will instead likely rely on increasing prices for the consumer (Begg, Fischer & Dornbusch, 2008; Sloman, Wride & Garratt, 2012).

In contrast to a monopoly model, the most desirable market structure in neoclassical economics is known as ‘perfect competition’. In practice, perfect competition is acknowledged as rarely observed within real world settings (Lieberman & Hall, 2005). However, perfect competition continues to function as an important tool within economic analysis as ‘a standard against which to judge the shortcomings of real-world industries’ (Sloman et al., 2012, p. 173). The model comprises four key elements:

³² As I go on to explain later in this chapter, both approaches have their roots in classical economics developed by Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill and others in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. In general terms, neoclassical economics is the dominant approach within contemporary economics and centres on the concepts of supply and demand in relation to individual rationality within markets, while Austrian economics is associated with both liberalism and methodological individualism.

1. An abundance of small firms in the market, who are thus 'price takers';
2. Firms have freedom of entry to the market;
3. All firms produce a homogenous product;
4. Producers and consumers have perfect knowledge about prices, costs, availability, and market demand.

(from Sloman et al., 2012, p. 173)

As I go on to explain in the next section of this chapter, underlying these four elements is also the assumption that consumers will act in their own self-interest, which is understood as rational behaviour.

Representing a significant break from the trend towards Keynesian economics in the post-World War II era,³³ economists associated with the neoclassical 'Chicago School'³⁴ drew an analogy between government service provision and monopoly inefficiency (Feigenbaum et al., 1999). Part of this critique rested on the negative outcomes associated with the lack of incentive by government to maximise profits and to reduce costs, with government framed as a 'lazy' monopoly (Henig, 1994, p. 59). Thus, government will often continue to invest in poorly performing ventures and will lack motivation to change course, while the scale of government bureaucracy is also likely to result in delays in responding to systemic or programmatic failures (Friedman, 1953).

Ball (1993a) notes that arguments against public monopolies also include an assumed lack of diversity in provision, which is seen to limit the possibilities for parents to select schools to best meet the needs of an individual child. Related to this critique, Chubb & Moe (1990) suggest that government education imposes a dominant model of schooling that parents are unlikely to be able to challenge: 'parents and students are not well enough organised to be very powerful. In the struggle to control public authority, they tend to be far outweighed by teachers'

³³ Drawing on various theories associated with John Maynard Keynes, this approach is associated with government investment in the economy to correct inefficiencies in macroeconomic outcomes (Sloman et al., 2012).

³⁴ A term coined in the 1950s to refer to economists teaching in the Economics Department at the University of Chicago.

unions, professional organisations, and other entrenched interests' (p. 31). This argument is in line with mainstream neoclassical economics, which holds that a range of vendors ensures that no individual firm or buyer controls the market to their own advantage (Begg et al., 2008; Sloman et al., 2012). Thus, Chubb & Moe (1990) propose that owners of private schools, as enterprises that rely on income from student enrolment, have a stronger incentive to please their 'clients' and are more likely to be responsive to their preferences and concerns.

Like the neoclassical model, Austrian economics is critical of monopoly provision and in favour of market competition. This position centres around two key propositions: firstly, the significance of the profit incentive for market 'entrepreneurs'; and, secondly, the sovereignty of the consumer within the market (Dixon, 2004). Thus, profit, or the 'disincentive of loss' (Kirzner, 2013/1973, p. 223), acts to stimulate innovation and high-responsiveness to consumer demand. In the context of the UK school system, for example, Tooley (1998), a key advocate for LFP schooling (Nambissan & Ball, 2010), is critical of the lack of a financial penalty if a school is judged as failing and suggests that the result of a 'liberated supply side' (p. 53), would be more responsive providers, incentivised to meet children's needs. At the same time, if funding was tied to pupil enrolment, failing schools would have to close and the most popular services would be able to expand (Tooley, 1998).

Despite the similarities between Austrian and neoclassical economics in terms of the theoretical desirability of market competition, in contrast to the concept of perfect knowledge, Austrian economics uses the concept of tacit knowledge to explain how consumers navigate markets. Signifying knowledge that cannot necessarily be articulated (Polyani, 1967), tacit knowledge is related heavily to price, which takes the form of a communicative tool, distilling a range of market information and providing feedback to both vendors and buyers to allow them to modify their activities within the market accordingly (O'Neill, 1998). As I discuss later in this chapter, the concept of tacit knowledge has been drawn on in some analyses of education markets as useful for understanding how parents make quality judgements in information poor environments where official information about schools, or what Ball & Vincent (1998) call 'cold' knowledge, such as exam results,

may be unavailable.³⁵

In summary, in both neoclassical and Austrian economics private education markets are more efficient, more responsive and more accountable to parents than monopoly government provision. Within both frameworks, consumers are crucial in stimulating competition between vendors as well as in ensuring basic market functionality. As Tooley (2000) puts it: 'There's not much point in having competing education companies if parents and students don't get to choose' (p. 124).

3.2.2 Choice behaviour: the rational consumer

The role of choice within markets finds its origins in classical liberalism and the work of Adam Smith, who suggested that individual self-interest may be channelled positively for the good of wider society through the 'invisible hand' of market competition (Smith, 1993/1776). In this conceptualisation, Smith (1993/1776) argued that, through the mechanisms of demand and supply, a free market will self-regulate and in turn benefit wider society through more efficient resource allocation and lower costs. Crucially, such benefits are effectively unintended by-products of a free market approach rather than attained via centrally planned action or driven by compassion, as Smith (1993/1776) explains:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own self-interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantage.

(p. 11)

Thus, with a small number of exceptions such as preventing collusion between vendors, Smith proposed that the state should adopt a laissez-faire approach to market regulation (Sloman et al., 2012).

³⁵ Ball & Vincent (1998) identify two types of information that parents draw upon to inform their schooling decisions: 'cold' knowledge in the form of official information, and 'hot' knowledge, the unofficial information that is exchanged within social networks.

Following Smith (1993/1776), both neoclassical and Austrian economics generally assume that consumers are motivated by self-interest and behave accordingly to achieve maximum utility, or the highest levels of satisfaction (Sloman et al., 2012). This is defined as rational behaviour and, accordingly, rational choice is the process by which available options are identified and assessed according to consistent preference criteria and in view of fixed constraints to action, such as budget (Weintraub, 2007; Levin & Milgrom, 2004). In the context of schooling, the 'best' choice is generally assumed to mean a choice made in the best interests of the child (Bosetti, 2004). In addition, it is assumed that the quality of education, however defined, is the chief consideration with respect to rational decision-making (Henig, 1994).

The idea that parents are 'utility maximisers' (Bosetti, 2004), who seek to make the 'best' choice for each individual child within the family in terms of school quality, is central to contemporary arguments for school choice mechanisms as tools for wider sectoral improvement through competition; if parents make choices at random, or do not choose the 'best' school in direct comparison to others, then, it is argued, failing schools would continue to thrive and 'good' schools would be unable to expand. Thus, choice is necessary to ensure consumer satisfaction and overall market functionality (Tooley, 2005).

Predicated on such understandings of economic rationality, the benefits of choice are related to the threat of exit, or of not being chosen at all, which in a free market is understood as having a financial consequence for providers. On this basis, it has been suggested that schools in the private sector are likely to be more motivated to improve the quality of services, as has been proposed in relation to LFP schooling in India:

In a private school, the teachers are accountable to the manager (who can fire them), and, through him or her, to the parents (who can withdraw their children). In a government school the chain of accountability is much weaker, as teachers have a permanent job with salaries and promotions unrelated to performance.

(PROBE team, 1999, p. 64)

In his well-known framework of consumer decision-making, Hirschman (1970) argues that consumers may also choose to activate 'voice' to apply pressure to market operators instead of choosing to exit. Crucially, this may be driven by 'loyalty' to the school operator, which may encourage some parents to stay in an underperforming school to activate 'voice' to support institutional improvement. However, Hirschman (1970) notes that exit remains an option for any consumer; loyalty and voice may delay the exit option, but they do not negate it. While not associated with either the neoclassical or Austrian schools, Hirschman's theories have been drawn on by advocates for education markets in making the link between consumer choice and quality improvement, as Tooley (1995) explains:

When market mechanisms are in place, *both* 'exit' and 'voice' are available options. Under an authentic market system, if I am dissatisfied with my school then I can withdraw my custom ('exit'), *or* I can complain to the headteacher, newspaper, headteacher's union, or local politician ('voice'). Under a non-market system, I can only complain.

(pp. 30-31)

The concept of choice having benefits beyond an individual, akin to Smith's (1993/1776) invisible hand theory, is also used by Hirschman (1970) to resolve the difficulty that different groups are differently advantaged within markets and institutions in their ability to exercise both voice and exit. Hirschman (1970) characterises these groups as inert and alert clients and suggests that alert clients will exercise voice for the benefit of all. However, the presence of too many 'inert clients', who Hirschman (1970) suggests are not quality sensitive, will result in low standards as operators will not experience pressure from either exit or voice. Alert clients, or in educational terms 'active parent choosers', thus are presumed to play a key role in ensuring systemic quality improvements by stimulating market competition. As Dixon (2004) puts it: 'Entrepreneurship, competition, and the profit motive, stimulate efficiency, economic growth and benefit society as a whole' (p. 33). However, it remains important to stress that underlying the proposed benefits of competition is the assumption of rational behaviour on the part of consumers.

3.2.3 Freedom and equity

Aside from economic theories of market functionality, having the freedom to choose is a significant aspect of some commentators' defence of market mechanisms in education (Hargreaves, 1996). Classical liberalism not only holds that individual freedom and decision-making may lead to more efficient services, but that personal autonomy has an intrinsic value: 'most of our human faculties of perception, judgment, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are fully exercised in making a choice' (Mill, 1859, Chapter III, para. 3). Autonomous decision-making is thus understood by some to be at the core of moral conceptions of individual rights, defining areas of personal freedom over which government or other authorities may not legitimately interfere (Nucci, 2001).

The notion of choice as an expression of autonomy and as a fundamental human right is reflected in international human rights legislation and in political discourse across democratic states. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) enshrines autonomy, individuality and self-determination as fundamental human rights across a multitude of domains, including education:

Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

(UN General Assembly, 1948, Article 26.3)

Thus, some commentators have argued that school choice is a natural extension of freedom over child-rearing preferences (Levin, 2002). Freedom of choice arguments have also been made in the Indian context, such as by Shah & Miranda (2013), who invoke the UDHR in arguments for choice-led policy reforms. Elsewhere, Shah (22 May 2013), the founder of the Centre for Civil Society, a think-tank which runs the School Choice Campaign India, makes a similar argument: '[In India] this lack of choice or the lower degree of freedom is at the heart of our education problems' (para. 2).

School-choice mechanisms within government systems have also been promoted from a social justice perspective on the basis that increased choice can increase equity and social diversity as households from minority and disadvantaged

groups are able to access schooling that otherwise may be the preserve of more elite groups within society (Liu & Taylor, 2005; Waslander & Thrupp, 1997). Indeed, in the 1960s in the USA, 'school choice' was advocated by civil rights activists as a strategy for desegregation (Forman, 2004). In India, as Kingdon (2008) points out, the RtE Act 25% reservation has also been welcomed by those concerned with addressing educational segregation: 'Interestingly, the scheme is championed not by the right wing, the usual advocates of private education, but rather by those concerned with equity in education' (p. 131). Juneja (2014), for example, expresses cautious optimism that the reservation will result in greater social mixing in schools. Vinod Raina, an educationalist and academic involved in drafting the RtE Act, also argues for the 25% reservation on the grounds of social inclusion:

It is time we gave up our colonial biases that poor and disadvantaged children will pollute our smartly dressed children in classrooms and as parents and teachers, learn the lessons of inclusion.

(Raina, 25 May 2012, para. 8)

Promoting inclusive education was therefore one of the central objectives underlying the development of the RtE Act 25% reservation, and a mechanism that has been welcomed by some in the hope that it may result in enhanced social equality. Crucially, the role of government in this scenario is not to provide quality education directly, but to enable choice within the private market.

3.2.4 The role of government: enabling choice

Despite critiques of government monopolies, neoclassical economists generally acknowledge that governments have a role to play in preventing or correcting market failures (Begg et al., 1998). With respect to education, Mill also recognised the need for state intervention if parents did not ensure school access for their children: 'if the parent does not fulfil this obligation, the state ought to see it fulfilled' (Mill, 1859, Chapter V, para. 12). This has led to the rise of what some commentators have called 'quasi-markets' in many national contexts through the introduction of choice mechanisms within the state sector and devolved management responsibility,

but within the context of government funding and government administered quality assurance processes (Le Grand, 1991).

The emergence of such quasi-markets is also partly the result of an acknowledgement of economic barriers to parental choice: 'because of differences in income and wealth, the ability to vote with one's feet is unequally distributed in modern societies' (Hirschman, 1978, p.96). Hence several neoclassical economists have proposed introducing government-led mechanisms to stimulate market competition and to enable choice without imposing bureaucratic controls over providers. Most notably, Friedman (1962) introduced the concept of school vouchers 'redeemable for a specified maximum sum per child per year if spent on "approved" educational services' (p. 89). In conjunction with minimal government intervention in education outside of minimum standard setting, Friedman (1962) argued that a market orientated approach would lead to increased efficiency as parents would be able to utilise the voucher in order to exercise freedom of choice: 'Parents could express their views about schools directly by withdrawing their children from one school and sending them to another' (p. 91). This approach is also advocated by Hayek (2011/1960) and by Chubb & Moe (1990), who argue that with the introduction of a voucher system government responsibility for education could be limited to basic financing rather than provision. In the context of the LFP sector in India, Tooley & Dixon (2005) also suggest that vouchers, which they frame as replicating free and reduced fee scholarship places offered by LFP schools, could be a means of overcoming fee barriers to school choice.

Beyond financing for discrete initiatives such as vouchers, government intervention in markets is generally regarded as inherently inefficient by Austrian economists (Cordato, 1980; Dixon, 2004). In Tooley's (1998) estimation, for example, quasi-market measures in England distort free market competition and result in inequalities of access: '[in England] it is not surprising if there is inequality in current "choice" systems. This has nothing to do with markets, and everything to do with rigid state intervention which discourages innovation and enterprise' (p. 54). Similarly, in an analysis of the regulatory environment concerning private schools in

Hyderabad, Dixon (2004) argues that the circumvention of formal regulations and extra-legal practices enables schools to provide better quality education:

This research has established that private schools do not comply with the official rules and regulations in Hyderabad and that bribery and corruption are the order of the day [...] It is an innovative, thriving, prosperous industry answerable not to the government but to the consumer, the parent.

(p. 36)

Whilst the association between corruption and quality by Dixon (2004) may seem somewhat incongruous, a rejection of government regulation is arguably in keeping with an Austrian economic framework that sees externally imposed regulations as obstructive to overall consumer satisfaction and sectoral efficiency (Kirzner, 2013/1973). Indeed, given the lack of effective government regulation in practice over market entry, exit and quality norms (Kingdon, 2007), the LFP sector appears close to a truly 'free' private education market, as other researchers have also concluded (Srivastava, 2005). This is an important distinction with respect to the quasi-markets found in countries where research concerning school choice has been most active, such as the USA and England, and where much of the advocacy for LFP schools has arisen (Nambissan & Ball, 2010; Nambissan, 2014).

3.3 Education and social equality: some implications of a marketised approach

The previous section of this chapter outlined key theories and assumptions underlying a market-led approach to education reform. Having already stated that these approaches have informed advocacy work by transnational networks in the Indian context, it is necessary to note that such support has been framed within discourses concerning the right to basic education and the UEE agenda (Srivastava, 2010; Majumdar & Mooij, 2011; Day Ashley, 2013). For example, Tooley & Dixon (2005) champion the LFP sector as playing a key role in meeting global education targets concerning universal basic education: 'the existence and the contribution of

private schools to “education for all” is a cause for celebration’ (p. 2). At the same time, concerns from those challenging this interpretation are dismissed as wilfully obstructive:

The only message from the development experts appears to be that parents are misguided to be making such choices in favour of the private sector and that their progeny should be dragged back into government schools.

(Tooley, 2005a, p. 96)

Elsewhere, Dixon (2012) has also justified a pro-market approach, firstly on the basis that parents are indicating their preference by ‘voting with their feet’ and, secondly, because of the asserted superior quality of private schools:

What is wrong with acknowledging all the good that is emanating from the low-cost private sector and—instead of trying to fix the unfixable [government schools]—admiring, praising, and supporting school entrepreneurs and parents?

(Dixon, 2012, p. 196)

This approach in proposing the LFP sector as a viable and desirable alternative to government schooling, as well as underlining parents' rights to choose, is in line with what Srivastava (2010) characterises as the use of the social equity frame in privatisation discourse:

Proponents of privatisation most commonly employ the slice of the rights discourse focusing on individual rights in combination with the competition-choice-quality frame to argue that increased privatisation will extend avenues of social mobility.

(p. 527)

However, in contrast to claims whereby government schools are cast as ‘unfixable’ and private schooling as ‘good for the poor’ (Tooley & Dixon, 2005), the existing conceptual and empirical literature paints a more mixed picture concerning the quality of LFP provision and the potential for choice reforms to support the achievement of UEE. In what follows, and as a platform for the empirical study presented in subsequent chapters of this thesis, I will review the available literature

to establish what is already known about the implications of increased marketisation for social equality.

Given the size of the school choice literature at the global level, I will focus here on theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence relating most closely to the contexts of the current study. This includes debates on education quality and equality in India, empirical evidence concerning segregated patterns of school enrolment centring on the LFP sector, and conceptual insights concerning the role of parents as proxy consumers within education markets. Firstly, however, it is necessary to consider the implications of marketisation for education as a public good.

3.3.1 Is education a commodity?

When considering the implications of a marketised approach for school education, it is important to clarify that the term ‘education’ can infer both *process* such as tutoring, schooling, or self-direction, as well as *outcome* in the sense of knowledge or skills. In a market arrangement, it is education processes that are the article of trade; one cannot purchase knowledge, but one can purchase the opportunity to acquire knowledge, whether through schooling or educational resources. Whilst education processes and outcomes necessarily are connected, the distinction between the two is relevant when considering parental motivation within education markets.³⁶ In most cases, it is likely that the purchase of education as a process is driven by the desire for education outcomes.³⁷ As such, it is instructive to examine whether education outcomes and processes may be limited to private goods (benefits for an individual), or whether they may also have public good elements.

In brief, public goods are classified by economists according to two characteristics:

³⁶ As I discuss later in this chapter, how parents assess school quality in view of the process-outcome distinction is also significant within a market set-up; attention to both aspects (i.e. quality of processes and quality of outcomes) are likely to be of concern for stakeholders in this respect, although the causal relationship between the two may be difficult to determine.

³⁷ Although it is possible to conceive of an educational process being purchased *for its own sake*, with education outcomes being less clear as the defined end goal.

1. Non-excludability: it is not possible to exclude non-payers from consuming the good;
2. Non-rivalry in consumption: additional people consuming the good do not diminish the benefit to others.

(Varian, 2010; Sloman et al., 2012)

Drawing on the above criteria, in societies where school education is compulsory and state financed, such as India, it is relatively straightforward to classify the process of formal education (schooling) as a clear public good. It is non-excludable, as it is free at the point of access, and non-rivalrous, as one individual attending school does not preclude schooling for another. Within a private system this reverses, as access is limited to those who can pay; therefore, school education becomes both excludable and rivalrous. However, whilst education as a process may be bought and sold (and in this way become a marketable commodity), it becomes more difficult to define the boundaries between public and private goods when we consider education outcomes.

Educational outcomes in the form of skills, knowledge, school examinations and other qualifications are recognised as having material value within employment markets and the financial returns on investment are well-documented by empirical research. For example, men in India with even minimal English language skills have been identified as earning an hourly wage up to 13% higher than their non-English speaking counterparts (Azam, Chin & Prakesh, 2013). Perhaps indicating an awareness of this trend, parents' aspirations for their children's future employment have been documented as influencing the decision to access private, English-medium schooling (Donner, 2005; Galab et al., 2013; Sancho, 2013), or in some cases formal education more generally (Jeffrey, Jeffrey & Jeffrey, 2008). Beyond the labour market, transnational research in various contexts has identified other individual-level benefits associated with higher levels of education, such as higher life expectancy and happiness (OECD, 2013), although this relationship is correlational rather than causal.

However, treating education outcomes as purely private goods is problematic, as they may also encompass unbounded public benefits. For example,

empirical research has demonstrated how the benefits associated with literate individuals may be 'shared' with non-literate family, friends and neighbours (Maddox & Esposito, 2013). Such benefits may include those with respect to public health (Alderman, Hentschel & Sabates, 2001; Borooah, 2009), economic growth (Coulombe, Tremblay & Marchand, 2004; Krueger & Lindahl, 2001; McMahon, 2006) and gender equality (Maddox, 2005). Reductions in fertility, mortality and crime have also been associated with basic education in several national contexts (Colclough, 2012).

Moreover, it is important to recognise the role of school education in processes of socialisation and thus the significance for government and the wider social body. Dewey (1938), for example, notes the role of education in working to build and to maintain community: 'education is a regulation of the process of coming to share in the social consciousness; and [...] the adjustment of individual activity on the basis of this social consciousness is the only sure method of social reconstruction' (p. 16). Similarly, in *The Republic*, Plato argues that the role of education is to prepare citizens to live within their society and thus to maintain social order (Barrow, 1976). Government and wider society thus have vested interests in both education processes and outcomes in terms of goals surrounding social cohesion.

Recognition of the public good aspects of education, and the significance of education for the wider social body, has led some commentators to challenge 'individualistic socio-economic theory' inherent in definitions of public and private goods (UNESCO, 2015b, p. 11) and to propose a definition of education as a 'common good', or 'those [goods] that contribute to the general interest, enabling society as a whole to be reinforced and to function better, as well as individuals to live better' (Daviet, 2016, p. 8). Daviet (2016) asserts that the private sector has a role to play in defining common goods and, as detailed earlier in this chapter, various commentators have proposed government funded school vouchers in view of economic barriers to access and in recognition of the significance of education for wider society and as a human right. However, it is not clear that private provision or the diversification of the government school sector more broadly are reconcilable

with the idea of education as a common good. Part of this potential irreconcilability rests on the positional good aspects of education.

Positional goods are those whose value is determined by their scarcity within a market setting, which bestows goods with both an absolute and a relative value. As Robertson (2013) observes: 'if everyone had a PhD, its value would be very greatly reduced' (p. 9). Thus, in a competitive market setting, parents may be concerned with the performance of their children not only in absolute terms, but relative to other children (Adnett & Davies, 2002). The fact that choices are limited within a privatised system raises a social justice concern that choice-making by some may work to constrain the choices of others, outcomes that may be unintended but contribute to the development and maintenance of unequal social structures (Young, 2006; 2011).

Perceptions of relative advantage may be related to perceived opportunities within the labour market (Adnett & Davies, 2002), which, as already outlined, would seem to play a role in shaping parents' schooling choices in some contexts. At the same time, a notion of relative value also means that, while disadvantages for some families may not be intentional on an individual basis, advantage for some is reliant on failure for others:

For commodification to work in the area of a basic social process such as education, exclusion is vital. There need to be visible losers, if parents are to be persuaded to pay for their children to become winners.

(Connell, 2013b, p. 4)

In response to Ranson (1993), who concurs with Connell (2013b), Ball (1993a) and others in drawing attention to the success-failure aspect of education in a competitive market, Tooley (1995) invokes Smith's (1776) theory of how self-interest may work towards a collective good through competition. However, just as Tooley (1995) asserts that it is 'not good enough for Ranson to simply deny [the theory of self-interest] in one sentence' (p. 24), the observation that 'Smith spent a large part of two closely-argued volumes [*Wealth of Nations*] explaining why he thought this was not the case' (ibid.) is irrelevant to how markets operate in the real

world. Indeed, as previously outlined, there is plausible evidence to suggest that education outcomes have positional good aspects within a marketised system. Discourses of derision surrounding government schooling in India (see section 2.3) and the creation of ‘visible losers’ (households who continue to access government schools) may thus be one factor driving enrolment within the private sector even amongst relatively low-income households.

3.3.2 Defining quality education: efficiency and (or?) equality

Drawing attention to the private and public interests in education illuminates some of the difficulty in establishing a set definition of quality, including for government (Winch, in press). While there is growing consensus about the need to provide access to ‘good quality education’ in most countries, there is less agreement about what this means in practice. The 2005 *Education For All Global Monitoring Report* points out that ‘agreement about the objectives and aims of education will frame any discussion of quality and that such agreement embodies moral, political, and epistemological issues that are frequently invisible or ignored’ (UNESCO, 2004, p. 37). However, such an agreement may not be reached and conflicts may be ‘fudged’ through definitions that are left deliberately ambiguous (Winch, 1996). This serves to highlight the multifaceted nature of quality, as well as the recognition that quality is grounded in values, cultures, and traditions of both societies and individuals (Adams, 1993). Thus, quality is not absolute, but involves negotiation between a variety of concerns and societal norms.

While the fulfilment of UEE has been a key aim of India’s government since the time of Independence, the RtE Act represents a significant legislative step by establishing school quality norms at the national level that are designed to cover both private and government schools. Juneja (2014) argues that the introduction of the 25% reservation and concurrent rules concerning non-discrimination for its enactment mark an attempt by government to promote educational equality and inclusion as part of a broader understanding of sectoral quality in line with UEE objectives. Nevertheless, the conception of quality outlined in the RtE Act is focuses

on inputs and infrastructure, such as the presence of a boundary wall and a school playground, rather than in relation to learning outcomes, which are left out entirely (Gol, 2009).

The lack of a fully comprehensive framework concerning school and education quality at a policy level is relevant to an investigation of marketisation and parental choice because of the assumption reflected within pro-market education discourse that introducing competition into education through choice will improve school quality (see section 3.2.2). In critiquing the assumed relationship between quality and parental preferences, some commentators have cautioned against the lack of attention to broader educational objectives: 'That the demand of the market should shape the idea of quality rather than the social and political goals of education contemplated at both the individual and societal level needs to be questioned' (Mehendale, 2014). Despite this, school quality debates in India in recent years 'have been steeped in a neoliberal perspective on the political economy' (Kumar, 2010), dominated by a discourse of efficiency and 'bang for the buck' (ibid., p. 14). Sarangapani & Mukhopadhyay (in press) also note the significance of the ASER Reports in recent years in shaping educational quality discourse around measurable learning outcomes, which are closely linked to ideas concerning educational efficiency and have tended to centre around a simplistic public-private binary. In this way, 'empirical research on quality continues to be constructed around selective indicators of provisioning or outcomes and retain focus on schools for the poor' (ibid.). Hence others have argued that privatisation undermines a more holistic conception of educational quality:

The emerging 'corporatised' understanding of quality, viewed in terms of learning guarantee, teacher accountability and the scientific management of education, is antithetical to the understanding of quality seen as being integral to the concept and process of education.
(Batra, 2013, p. 223)

Indeed, several investigations of the LFP sector in India frame quality in terms of the relationship between learning outcomes and costs per child, with LFP schools deemed to be 'better value' than government schools despite only marginal gains in

learning outcomes (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2015; Jain & Dholakia, 2010). However, this understanding of quality is contentious, in part because learning outcomes across both private and government sectors have been found to be low in an absolute sense (Karopady, 2015). Some national level studies have also found that differences in learning outcomes between government and unaided private schools are not statistically significant once the socio-economic background of pupils has been controlled for (Chudgar & Quin, 2012). Furthermore, it does not follow that increased expenditure in private institutions will result in any improvement in learning outcomes, as Muralidharan & Sundararaman (2015) point out. Thus, in addition to the shakiness of the claim that private schools produce better learning outcomes, the championing of 'schools for the poor' based on a competition-choice-quality model may also be problematic because it fails to take adequate account of the social justice implications associated with the 'corporatised' nature of quality that Batra (2013) describes.

The balance between quality and equality considerations in expanding school access has long been a subject of debate in India. In an examination of what he terms 'the elusive triangle' of equality, quality and quantity, Naik (1979) notes that 'the Indian traditions in society and education included neither equality of educational opportunity nor a concept of education for all and had a narrow interpretation of "quality"' (p. 169). In seeking to bring together this triangle within an overall conception of systemic quality, Naik (1975) draws attention to the importance of evaluating the 'ends and means' (p. 40) of education in relation to educational objectives for individuals and wider society.

Likewise, in the more contemporary context, Kumar (2010) argues that the social good aims of education should be included within quality frameworks, with quality incompatible with continued gender inequality and other forms of implicit discrimination in schools. Thus, for Kumar (2010), the separation of equality and quality within Naik's (1979) 'elusive triangle' is illusory in the sense that quality can only be achieved in conjunction with equality (see also Dhankar, 2011). However, given the private and positional good aspects of education, the extent to which quality as produced through parental choice will align to these values is unclear.

Furthermore, in addition to challenging notions of quality that centre on ‘efficiency’ rather than common good aspects of education, proposals to include a focus on equality within quality frameworks are of relevance to school choice reforms in light of empirical evidence concerning inequalities of access to schooling in India.

3.3.3 Socio-economic inequalities and school access

Some commentators argue that LFP schools are the ‘best chance’ for lower income families to access quality education and are fervent advocates for further private expansion (Tooley & Dixon, 2003; Tooley, 2009; Tooley, 2015). However, in addition to disputes over the nature of quality within such schools detailed in the previous section, there are concerns that private sector growth has led to ‘hierarchies of access’ (Sharma & Ramachandran, 2009, p. 10) to schooling. For example, empirical research indicates that intersections of gender, caste, location and socio-economic status, as well as the number, spacing and gender of children within a family, all influence the probability of attending private schools (Hill et al., 2011; Woodhead et al., 2013; Bhattacharya et al., 2015; Kaur, 2017). At the same time, children from lower income and disadvantaged backgrounds are noted as being concentrated in government schools (Nambissan, 2010; Majumdar & Mooij, 2011; Verger & VanderKaaij, 2012).

Economic inequality is a key concern with respect to education privatisation, as it is seen to risk undermining universal provision by excluding those who are not able to pay (UNESCO, 2015a). Implying that financial barriers to school access may not be as substantial as perhaps assumed, Tooley & Dixon (2005) assert that ‘a significant number of places in private unaided schools are provided free or at reduced rates to serve the poorest of the poor’ (p. 2). However, while a small number of research studies have found that at least some children attending private schools in India are from the poorest backgrounds (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008; Baird, 2009), others have found that affordability is a major constraint to access (Härmä, 2008, 2011; Singh & Sarkar, 2012) and that wealth is a significant predictor of private school attendance (Woodhead et al., 2013). This, and evidence from other

national contexts, led the authors of a recent international literature review of LFP schooling to conclude the following:

Financial constraints are a key factor limiting or preventing poorer households from enrolling their children in private schools. Where children of poorer households do attend private schools, research indicates that welfare sacrifices are made and continued attendance is difficult to sustain.

(Day Ashley et al., 2015, p. 2)

Tooley & Longfield (2015) argue that the affordability issue is not exclusive to the private sector as there may be costs associated with government schooling that do not make it absolutely free to parents. However, in the context of rural Uttar Pradesh, Härmä (2009) finds that the poorest families were paying an average of 30% and 25.6% of their total household income for their children to attend unrecognised and recognised unaided private schools in contrast to 3.9% of their total household income for children to attend government schools. In Delhi, Tsujita (2014) also reports only very limited unaided private school enrolment by households living in slum areas of the city.³⁸ Moreover, ‘the children attending a private school are concentrated in the lower grades, and none of them are studying beyond grade six’ (ibid., p. 350). In an earlier study, Aggarwal & Chugh (2003) also report unaided private school dropout rates in Delhi slums of between 10% and 20% within one academic year due to economic constraints.

To support households to overcome cost constraints to school access, Robertson (2013) states that ‘there are policy levers that might be used to mitigate the worst excesses of these privatisation tendencies’ (p. 10). Such strategies include the introduction of government-funded school vouchers, as detailed in section 3.2.4, to level the playing field of school choice for disadvantaged families. However, emerging evidence concerning the RtE Act 25% reservation suggests that relatively more privileged families are better able to take advantage of choice-mechanisms to support school access in practice. This includes being able to afford the additional costs still associated with private school attendance (Srivastava & Noronha, 2016),

³⁸ Only 4.9% of the 713 children ages 5-14 in 417 surveyed households were attending a private school.

as well as the ability to negotiate the bureaucracy associated with school admissions (Mehendale et al., 2015). Accounts of schools failing to abide by the terms of the reservation, for example requesting donations or charging fees (Mehendale et al., 2015; Batra, 2015; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016), also stand at odds with Dixon's (2004) celebration of corruption within the LFP sector as beneficial to parents.

Exclusionary practices and discriminatory treatment of children from lower income and traditionally marginalised groups have been documented in several accounts of schooling in India (Subrahmanian, 2003; Ramachandran & Naorem, 2013). Whilst such practices are not confined to the unaided private sector, empirical evidence suggests that children admitted to school under the RtE Act 25% reservation may be at risk of experiencing discrimination and negative stereotyping by school staff (Mehendale et al., 2015). Similarly, private school admission criteria that include parents being non-smoking, vegetarianism and mothers' level of education (*Action Committee Unaided Recognised Private Schools v Directorate of Education*, 2016) also signal screening practices by schools that belie the consumer sovereignty model that Dixon (2004) envisages. As Majumdar (2014) observes: 'many private schools as well as "star" coaching centres (for example, FIITJEE)³⁹ conduct screening tests for prospective tutees' (p. 12).

Accounts of the gap between choice in theory and in practice in other national contexts have led some commentators to conclude that disadvantaged households generally do not benefit from increased education privatisation: 'Marginalised groups fail to enjoy the bulk of positive impacts and also bear the disproportionate burden of the negative impacts of privatisation' (The Right to Education Project, 2014, p. 9). Indeed, a substantial body of evidence from multiple national contexts has drawn on sociological theories of social reproduction, notably that developed by Bourdieu (1977), to show that those from more privileged backgrounds are better able to access and deploy the sorts of material, social and cultural resources that are needed to take advantage of choice policies, leading to the marginalisation of less desirable schools and the pupils who attend them (in the

³⁹ The Forum for Indian Institute of Technology and Joint Entrance Examination, a nationwide coaching centre for students in Classes VI to XII.

context of England see for example: Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995; Reay & Ball, 1997; Ball, 2003; Crosier & Davies, 2006). Whilst the research evidence concerning schooling and the middle classes is relatively limited in India compared to England, a strategy of ‘concerted cultivation’ (Lareau, 1987) with respect to children’s education has been documented by some researchers (Fernandes, 2006; Lukose, 2010; Nambissan, 2010; Scrase & Ganguly-Scrase, 2011). For example, Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase (2008) find that amongst middle-class parents in West Bengal, ‘Increasingly, financial capital is being used to purchase an English-medium private education and to send a child abroad for university education, and so to build one’s stock of cultural capital’ (p. 11). Similarly, Fernandes (2006) points to the significance of education for the ‘new’ middle class in India as a strategy of upward mobility, with new aspirations and norms concerning private, English-medium schooling transforming education into a ‘thicker set of class practices’ (p. 76) serving to further entrench existing socio-cultural distinctions and inequalities of language, lifestyle and credentials.

In response to empirical evidence documenting socio-cultural advantages with respect to children’s education in England, Tooley (2000) concludes that such issues are inescapable: ‘To arrive at real equality of opportunity, you’d have to abolish the family’ (p. 81). However, as Brighouse (2003) asserts, the entrenched nature of social class inequalities does not mean dismissing them: ‘The fact that the problem cannot be eliminated never justifies abandoning attempts to mitigate it’ (p. 120). Given the relative lack of research concerning the school choice practices of lower income households in India in the post-RTE period, there is a clear need for research focused on the lived realities of education markets in local contexts to better understand whether increased privatisation is likely to exacerbate inequalities.

3.3.4 Parents as proxy consumers

As outlined in section 3.2.3, freedom of choice is one argument for choice-mechanisms in education. However, in education markets, traditional assumptions concerning the relationship between choice and empowerment are not

straightforward, as Brighouse (1997) notes:

Parents are not their children. When they make choices concerning their children's education they are not making choices about how to live their own lives, but about how someone else will end up living his or her life. Granting them choice does not grant them power over themselves, but power over someone else.

(p. 505)

The proxy consumer arrangement has a clear rationale: children are not usually financially independent and, particularly in the case of children of primary school age, may have limited knowledge, experience and capacity to allow them to make carefully considered decisions. However, as Winch (in press) notes, the role of parents as proxy consumers is important because we cannot assume that parents' aims within the choice process are solely educational, nor that they are made with only the child's interests in mind, as rational choice explanations generally assume (see section 3.2.2).

Indeed, in contrast to such assumptions, Sen (1977) and others have argued for a more nuanced interpretation of decision-making: 'choice may reflect a compromise among a variety of considerations of which personal welfare may be just one' (p. 324). In this respect, it should be noted that families do not make decisions about one child's education in isolation, but in the context of the wider family, including other children in the home. Given that affordability has been identified as a key constraint and influencing factor on parents' schooling decisions, households with several children may be more likely to weigh up benefits and constraints as a household unit rather than with respect to each individual child.

Empirical evidence suggests that families may invest a greater proportion of resources in one child within the family for a multitude of reasons, including gender norms (Maitra, Pal & Sharma, 2014). In cases of patrilocal patterns of residence, education of girls in the family can become devalued, as the benefits of educating a girl are seen as accruing to the family into which she eventually marries (PROBE team, 1999). Thus, the education of boys within the family may be prioritised financially over that of girls (Azam & Kingdon, 2013; Maitra et al., 2014); the gender gap in private school enrolment also appears to be widening over time in India, at least in

some northern states (Sahoo, 2016). While this could be interpreted as a rational decision in view of likely returns on investment (Maitra et al., 2014), such educational choice-making is clearly at odds with societal objectives concerning gender equality. Documented examples of instances when girls' education may be prioritised as an asset within the marriage market (Chopra, 2005; Srivastava, 2006) also illuminate how traditional gender ideologies may intertwine with poverty and community dynamics to shape conceptions of suitable schooling options, as well as the continuing significance of the role that considerations relating to girls' marriageability plays in choice-making, despite what may be shifting 'mental models' surrounding girls education (Srivastava, 2006).

The role of gender ideologies within schooling decisions indicate the inherent difficulty in balancing individual and societal interests in choice-making, as already outlined with respect to the public and private good aspects of education:

Balancing individual choice for addressing child-rearing preferences with a common educational experience that will promote equity and social cohesion has always been a major challenge for the educational system.

(Levin, 2002, p. 161)

In addition, differences in patterns of school enrolment by gender also draw attention to the role that socio-cultural factors may play in choice processes, issues that, as Verger et al. (2016) point out, are frequently neglected in analyses of the LFP sector: 'religious, political, social and cultural aspects are variables that tend to be omitted in many of the studies advocating LFPs, which consider that the reason behind the increasing demand for LFPs can be reduced to education quality' (p. 95). How choices are negotiated within the family unit, while relevant to a more developed understanding of decision-making processes, is also given scant attention. Indeed, a growing appreciation of choice as socially embedded has led some commentators to conclude that the asocial individual conceptualised in traditional rational choice theory is 'largely a fictional character' (Burns & Roszkowska, 2016, p. 205), with 'more realistic approaches' (ibid., p. 196) required to make sense of choice-making in lived experience.

3.4 How do lower income parents choose schools?

An assertion within some of the commentary concerning LFP schooling is that private sector growth has been driven by parental choice based on quality perceptions (Tooley, 2009; Dixon, 2012). Within such discourses, parents are framed as rational consumers (see section 3.2.2) who have ‘voted with their feet’ to exit a failing government sector (Johnson & Bowles, 2010). In this way, some of the school choice literature in India concerning the LFP sector, whilst not explicitly adopting a rational choice theory approach, reflects an assumption of consumer rationality. The following extract from Muralidharan & Sundararaman’s (2015) study of a school voucher programme in Andhra Pradesh state provides an example of this:

It is not obvious that they [private schools] represent a better value for the marginal parent who is paying for private schools over a free public school. Since test scores did not improve in math and Telugu,⁴⁰ the marginal parent would have to place a high value on Hindi scores to justify paying for the typical private school in our sample. While, we cannot rule out this possibility (or that parents valued other non-academic aspects of private schools), it may be important to provide better and easily understandable information on determinants of education quality to schools and parents.

(p. 1062)

While the authors do not claim a causal relationship between information and choice, assumptions of rational decision-making can be identified in the implication that parents have chosen the ‘wrong’ schools, as measured by the relationship between input (fees) and outcome (learning outcomes), and that this may be the result of imperfect information within the market. However, it is unclear what ‘determinants of education quality’ would be considered as relevant in practice from the perspective of the researchers and whether these would align to parents’ own conceptions of school quality. The focus on choice outcomes over choice processes within the literature also means that the role of ‘non-academic aspects of private schools’ in shaping schooling decisions remain under-researched. As I detail

⁴⁰ The official language of Andhra Pradesh.

throughout the remainder of this chapter, this is one of several significant limitations in applying the relatively narrow concept of rational choice to decision-making in education markets.

3.4.1 Parents' quality perceptions

Proponents of LFP schools and parental choice argue that lower income and disadvantaged families are quality conscious consumers with sufficient information to distinguish between schools. For example, Dixon, Tooley & Schagen (2013) suggest that: 'the choices favouring low-cost private schools made by parents in the slums are based on quality considerations, like those made by wealthier parents' (p. 102). However, empirical research in India concerning specific school quality preferences amongst lower income households is limited, beyond what has been identified as widespread disillusionment with government schooling (James & Woodhead, 2014).

One study that has explored parents' quality considerations is the Young Lives study in Andhra Pradesh, which found that 'good quality teaching' is a key aspect of parents' conceptions of school quality and related decision-making. This was found to encompass areas such as 'care' of children, giving homework and engaging in teaching activities in a class (Singh & Sarkar, 2012; Galab et al., 2013; Morrow & Wilson, 2014). Other researchers have sought to define school quality based on observable aspects of school infrastructure that parents may consider when making schooling decisions, such as the presence of toilets, ceiling fans, and televisions (Tooley & Dixon, 2006; Tooley et al., 2007; Goyal & Pandey, 2009). As Sarangapani & Winch (2010) have pointed out, visible resources rather than education processes or outcomes do not serve as fully adequate proxies for quality with respect to curriculum, pedagogy or assessment. Sarangapani & Winch (2010) also question whether parents are able to judge the quality of teaching and learning: 'Most of the prospective clients of PUUs [private unrecognised unaided schools] will lack the specialist knowledge of education needed to make informed decisions about educational purchases' (p. 504). In their view, tacit knowledge without prior

knowledge or experience is insufficient to appreciate the quality of what is on offer in education markets, particularly given that parents may not have any experience of formal education.

In the context of the LFP sector in Pakistan, Fennell (2013) concurs with Sarangapani & Winch (2010) in questioning whether parents are able to judge school or teaching quality accurately prior to accessing a school, one reason that may be driving high rates of exit and school change. As part of an investigation of disadvantaged parents' schooling choices in Peru, Balarin (2015) also notes that perceptions of the superior quality of LFP schools were often based on misleading proxies, for example, private schools using 'more copybooks' and teaching subjects at a more advanced level than in government schools. However, as Balarin (2015) points out, such quality perceptions and associated proxies are problematic:

This idea that more subjects or more "advanced" topics stand for better quality teaching/learning processes has little support from educational theory [...] Parents, moreover, had little or no elements to judge whether their children were actually learning the said knowledge.

(p. 21)

The relationship that parents may perceive between specific visible resources, quality of educational processes, and quality of outcomes is thus not necessarily borne out in practice.

In addition, criteria that parents use to make quality judgements may not always conform to the expectations of researchers or policy-makers. For example, while small class sizes are generally found to be a criterion cited by parents in the existing school choice literature outside of India (for example Ohba, 2013; West & Noden, 2003), Srivastava (2008) identifies that large class sizes were utilised as a quality indicator by some parents interviewed for her study because this was equated with popularity. Equally, while a rise in private tuition outside of formal schooling might be viewed by some as a sign of dissatisfaction with the quality of schooling on offer, one study in Bangladesh found that parents generally did not view the child's need for private tuition as a failing of the school, but as an accepted necessity (Cameron, 2011). Reflective of what Fernandes (2006) identifies as the role

of English as ‘a structural marker of middle class identity’ (p. 69), several commentators have also noted the desirability of English-medium schooling for lower income parents in India (for example Tooley et al., 2007). However, as Sarangapani & Winch (2010) note, this has no inherent bearing on the quality of teaching and learning in schools: ‘A school that is seen as desirable is not necessarily a good school and English as a medium of instruction is not necessarily a worthwhile attribute’ (p. 509). Despite this, the deployment of English-medium schooling as a key mechanism for realising social class aspirations may be a key explanatory factor in the wider growth of the LFP sector in some contexts (Härmä, 2011).

3.4.2 Non-quality factors

Much of the existing research on school choice within many countries has focused almost exclusively on conceptions of quality and the ‘objective’ factors parents may consider when selecting a school, such as distance and cost. In their review of the literature surrounding the LFP sector at the global level, for example, Verger et al. (2016) conclude that ‘closeness to home is one of the main school choice criteria for many poor families’ (p. 94), which the authors identify is driven by convenience, cost considerations and security concerns.

However, socio-cultural factors are also likely to play a role in shaping schooling decisions in various ways, several of which remain under-researched in the Indian context and the LFP sector more generally. For example, despite identified gender differences in school enrolment (Maitra et al., 2014), very few studies have examined the role of gender in shaping schooling choices beyond a focus on costs. Goswami (2015) is a notable exception in identifying gender norms as driving the choice of segregated schools close to the family home for girls in one village in rural Assam. In rural villages in Rajasthan and Punjab respectively, Hill et al. (2011) and Kaur (2017) also note the role played by intersections of caste and gender in shaping school enrolment patterns. However, how such dynamics play out in a densely urban environment or among different social groups is unclear.

In response to Tooley et al.’s (2007) study of LFP schooling in Hyderabad,

Sarangapani & Winch (2010) also point out the significance of the city as a case study for generalising insights concerning the LFP sector. Home to a large Urdu-speaking Muslim population, linguistic and religious preferences may help to explain the relatively high demand for private schooling within this context. The Sachar Committee also notes at the national level that ‘access to government schools for Muslim children is limited’ (Government of India [GoI], 2006, p. 85), with government neglect a contributory factor in the uptake of private schooling by this group. Similarly, Matthan, Anusha & Thapan (2014) posit that concerns over safety following anti-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad in 2002 and the renewed significance of community solidarity may have encouraged Muslim parents in the city to enrol their children in Urdu-medium, private aided schools close to their family homes.

In a different vein, the significance of schooling decisions to parental identity draws attention to the possible social cache that may be accrued through private schooling choices (Winch, in press). Research in various national contexts, such as England (West & Noden, 2003; Ball, 2003; Reay et al., 2011), Finland and Chile (Kosunen, Carrasco & Tironi, 2015), for example, has identified parental attentiveness to the social composition of school spaces. Writing about parents’ choice of private schooling in England, Foskett & Hemsley-Brown (2003) note that family tradition is significant in determining which school a child will attend. Moreover, the very fact of having to pay for schooling may be an attraction for parents: ‘Parents may choose to pay for private-sector schooling because they believe others think it is expensive and will perceive that participating in the sector is an indicator of wealth and hence of personal success’ (Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 2003, p. 204).

Indeed, in the Indian context, Srivastava (2005) notes that ‘social status’ is one factor influencing parents’ choice of LFP schools, but does not elaborate as to the nature of this within the study setting. However, as already noted earlier in this chapter, the classificatory function of particular forms of education and the socially aspirational nature of private, English-medium schooling amongst the ‘new’ middle class (Fernandes, 2006; Lukose, 2010; Scrase & Ganguly-Scrase, 2011) suggest that investigations of choice should be attentive to the social significance of schooling

choices for parents as part of a wider set of lifestyle choices that act as status indicators of middle-class identity (Fernandes, 2006). Indeed, Sancho (2015) suggests that while the scale of the private sector in India indicates that accessing private schooling should not be considered a social class indicator in and of itself, as it might be in other national contexts, conspicuous consumption forms one aspect of the desire for private schooling in addition to more specific perceptions of labour market advantages (see also Sancho, 2013). That government schools are argued to have become 'a ghettoized option of last resort for the poorest and most marginalised in society' (Härmä, 2010, p. 38), also attests to the social significance of schooling choices for households and the role of schooling as a means of social differentiation.

With regard to parental attentiveness to the social composition of school spaces, West & Noden (2003) identify the role played by parental aspirations in parents' decision to send their children to private schools in London. More specifically, the appeal of private schools for such parents rests on what are perceived to be their better academic outcomes and the opportunities they provide for socialisation, with peers from similar social backgrounds offering a sense of 'cultural security' (West & Noden, 2003, p. 191). By contrast, the value of a 'social mix' was found to be significant for parents accessing comprehensive schooling (West & Noden, 2003; see also Reay et al., 2011). Based on an investigation of middle-class parents' choice of a high poverty urban public school in the USA, Cucchiara & Horvat (2014) suggest that schooling choices were one means through which parents negotiated their identities, serving to draw linkages and distinctions between themselves and other parents, and to reinforce their sense of self-identity as 'liberal urbanites' (p. 505). De Neve (2011) also identifies children's schooling as signifying respectability and 'worldliness' (p. 84) amongst middle class families in Tamil Nadu. Schooling choices may thus carry social meanings for parents as individuals and with respect to familial status, which may be as important to their choice-making as educational outcomes.

3.4.3 Choice behaviour in the market

As noted earlier in this chapter, the strategic work that middle-class parents engage in to gain relative advantages within education markets has been a subject of considerable research attention in many national contexts, and to an increasing extent in India. However, the choice processes of lower income households in India remain under-researched, particularly how choices are negotiated within households in the post-RtE Act era (James & Woodhead, 2014). Choice processes by parents accessing government schooling, or whose children may be out of school, are also under-represented within the research literature.

In other national contexts, several researchers have found that lower income and disadvantaged parents are unlikely to have access to detailed knowledge with respect to school quality, which may impact on how they negotiate the education market (Balarin, 2015). Similarly, lack of awareness of the RtE Act in India has been identified among families in recent research regarding the enactment of the 25% reservation (Mehendale et al., 2015; Srivastava & Noronha, 2016). In the context of inadequate regulation of schools, exemplified by the scale of the unrecognised private school sector (Muralidharan & Kremer, 2008), there is a risk that parents, especially those with little experience of formal schooling, may be unfairly disadvantaged because of information asymmetries within the market.

In terms of the consequences of imperfect knowledge within markets, some economists have proposed that this can lead to ‘herding’, with individuals imitating group behaviours rather than deciding independently based on their own, private information (Baddeley, 2010). Srivastava (2008) counsels against assumptions about the ‘false consciousness’ of disadvantaged households, and the idea that poorer households do not make informed choices about education. However, she also notes that most of the 60 parents included within her study, all of whom were currently accessing one of two LFP private schools, had not visited the schools prior to enrolment, drawing instead on information gleaned through conversations with other parents. The absence of standardised assessment data at the elementary level in India and other ‘official’ information such as league tables also means that what

Ball & Vincent (1998) term 'hot' knowledge, or socially embedded knowledge, gleaned through social networks, is likely to be significant within choice processes and to parents' conceptions of school quality.

In addition, existing research elsewhere in India has also illuminated how affordability constraints may impact the ability of parents to exercise 'exit' and 'voice' in the manner conceptualised by Hirschman (1970) and others in order to drive overall market improvements. For example, whilst James & Woodhead (2014) identify a high rate of school changes in the early years of primary school amongst families in Andhra Pradesh, economic constraints as well as school quality concerns are identified as key drivers behind school dropout and re-enrolment decisions, with parents being forced to withdraw their children due to inability to pay the fees. Similarly, Srivastava (2008) identifies a practice of 'fee jumping', whereby children are moved between multiple private schools throughout a school year to avoid payments. In a different national context, Phillips & Stambach (2008) also point out that, rather than a rational assessment of available options at any given moment in time, parents in rural Tanzania 'sought and seized' (p. 61) schooling opportunities on an ongoing basis. Thus, how parents gather and use information about school quality, and the significance of this in determining choice outcomes, may not align to expectations of rational consumer behaviour, underlining the inadequacy of a rational choice framework for the investigation of choice and serving to trouble the relationship between competition-choice and quality in education that is assumed in rational choice theory.

3.4.4 Making decisions within households

While a notion of household homogeneity has been subject to various critiques based on regional variations and the presence of alternative family arrangements (D'Cruz & Bharat, 2001), the patriarchal, patrilocal joint family is generally understood as comprising the traditional family structure in India, associated with sex segregation, gender role socialisation and the dominance of male members of the family over decision-making in all aspects of family life (Kordyban, Hicks & Bahr,

2016). Identifying the significance of such traditional familial arrangements for education, Drury (1993) records a relatively autocratic decision-making process amongst urban, middle class households, whereby the eldest male relative is responsible for approving important educational choices: 'Once a decision is made it must be followed [...] I have encountered only two cases of [study] informants or their siblings explicitly rejecting a major education decision handed down by their elders. In both cases they had to leave home' (p. 73). While Drury (1993) also notes that this appeared to be changing to a greater focus on parents as the key decision makers, with senior male relatives engaged with as a token of respect rather than necessity (p. 168), the role of the extended family may still prove significant to how decisions are made within households in the more contemporary context (Chaudhary, 2013) in contrast to what Windle (2015) notes are assumptions within much of the choice literature of a nuclear family arrangement.

At the same time, processes of migration, urbanisation and socioeconomic transitions over recent decades have led to a decrease in joint family living arrangements (Sonawat, 2001; Desai et al., 2010) and to what some researchers have identified as ideological and structural shifts in family roles (Tuli & Chaudhary, 2010; Roopnarine, Krishnakumar & Vadgama, 2013), including with respect to women's agency in decision-making. For example, women's liberation movements, rising living costs, expanded school access and women's educational attainment have been identified as leading to the increasing participation of women in the paid labour force (D'Cruz & Bharat, 2001) and what appears to be greater egalitarianism in decision-making including in areas such as family planning (Senarath & Gunawardena, 2009).

However, empirical research indicates that men still exert more control over economic resources than women (Desai et al., 2010), while women's work outside of the family home is subject to significant caste, class and regional variations (Dreze & Sen, 2004; Bordia Das, 2005; Fuller & Narasimhan, 2013). In particular, the ongoing significance of women's public behaviour for familial honour and associated restrictions over women's freedom of movement (Oommen, 2005; Nielsen & Waldrop, 2014; Kelly, Krishna & Bhabha, 2016) mean that determinants of women's

empowerment and the nature of women's agency within families remain contested (Kabeer, 1999). Thus, while some studies have identified that mother's education is positively correlated to children attending a private school (Kelly et al., 2016), this does not necessarily indicate a direct relationship between women's education and increased decision-making power within households. However, this does not mean an absence of agency or resistance by women to ascribed social norms. Indeed, Kabeer (1999) notes that within the South Asian context, women's renegotiation of power relations is likely to centre on 'backstage' influences (p. 448) within households to preserve the public image of the 'traditional' decision-maker (i.e. senior male relatives). Thus, while as Jeffrey et al. (2012) note that 'questions about "who made decision X" are unlikely to get very revealing answers' (p. 18), accounts of choice-processes within households may illuminate the ways in which women's agency is articulated through choice-work for their children's education.

The relationship between women's agency and school choice is of interest given empirical research in England, the USA and elsewhere which has shown that it is very often mothers who take on the day-to-day activities regarding their children's schooling, and that such choice work is both raced and classed (David, West & Ribbens 1994; David et al., 1997; Reay, 1998; Cooper, 2009; Chapman & Bhopal, 2013). Similarly, empirical research in India has identified the active participation of women within household decision-making processes concerning education (Drury, 1993; Donner, 2005; Devika, 2007; Lukose, 2010; Vincent & Menon, 2011; Panda, 2015), although this has focused largely on middle-class mothers rather than mothers at the lower end of the income spectrum. However, as Reay (1998) argues with respect to working class mothers in England, '[the] unexamined assumption that parental involvement is a shared, equal task between parents' (p. 10) erases inequalities based on intersections of class and gender, and 'omits any discussion of how schooling affects the work of mothers' (p. 11). At the same time, while family structures are likely to contain powerful reproductive elements (Arnot & Naveed, 2014), it is also important to recognise processes of transformation and resistance to social norms in decision-making processes. Indicating the significance of 'school

choice’ to studies of the family, this kind of interplay between social structures and individual agency is unlikely to be captured utilising a rational choice framework.

3.4.5 Conceptualising choice: moving beyond the rational consumer

The empirical evidence outlined in this chapter suggests that assigning weight to fixed preference criteria is not likely to capture the complex interaction of preferences, constraints and contextual factors that are entangled within choice processes. For example, definitions of quality amongst households are likely grounded within the local context and parents’ experiences of education and schooling, as well as being intertwined with parents’ perceptions of the purposes of education and parental motivations. The inadequacy of relativistic measures when exploring school choice is also apparent. As Rubinowitz & Rosenbaum (2000) state, ‘satisfaction is almost always relative. While surveys usually answer questions about satisfaction as if it were an absolute, people can only answer relative to what they know or expect’ (p. 129). Thus, if all parents say that they want ‘high quality’ education for their children, this does little to help us understand what this means in practice. Doubt, intuition and emotion are also unlikely to be captured by a rational choice approach (Bowe et al., 1994; Burns & Roszkowska, 2016)

Writing over 20 years ago, Bowe et al. (1994) noted that the criteria for choice making (reasons for choosing) had been the focus of much of the school choice literature at the time as opposed to an understanding of the process of choosing, and that this did little to illuminate how the choice process works in action. Similarly, Bell (2005) argues that ‘the research that informs the backbone of the [school] choice literature largely treats the choice process as a black box, whose internal workings remain a mystery’ (p. 6). While over the last few years the research concerning the socio-cultural nature of school choice has grown in some national contexts, such as in England (Reay et al., 2011), the US (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014), Finland and Chile (Seppänen et al., 2015), this is not yet the case within many countries where LFP schools have flourished, including India. Research that focuses on learning outcomes and school enrolment patterns, which comprises most of the literature concerning

the LFP sector in India, does not necessarily tell us much about what parents' value when choosing schooling, parents' experiences within the market, and the consequences for social equality. Nor does it tell us much about the kinds of subtle complexities of family structures and relationships that come to bear on what Ball, Macrae & Maguire (2000) refer to as 'the choreography of decision-making within families' (p. 144).

Furthermore, as Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe (1994) pointed out at the time they were carrying out their research on school markets in England, parents in the school choice literature 'tend[ed] to appear only as 'cardboard-cut-out' figures who seem[ed] to operate in a vacuum, unaffected by the material or socio-cultural context of choice making' (p. 7). While this tendency has shifted in the intervening years, the homogenisation of 'the poor' in some of the literature concerning the LFP sector and choice has been noted by some commentators (Srivastava, 2005; Nambissan, 2012). For example, Tooley et al. (2007), as Sarangapani & Winch (2010) note, do not include any details concerning the socio-cultural specificities of their study sample, but present it as 'typical' of Indian reality, while Rose & Dyer (2008) also criticise Tooley (2005b) for the absence of 'any attempt to define what is meant by the "poor"' (p. 23). Such issues are significant both in terms of methodological rigour and in the dehumanising erasure of differences between households (Thomson & Wildavsky, 1986).

In seeking to capture the heterogeneity of parents' schooling decisions and choice experiences, this research study follows from empirical investigations of choice in a range of other national contexts in conceptualising choice as both multi-dimensional and socially embedded, whereby 'choice as a concept is related to the choosers' social position and their social, practical and emotional possibilities and limitations' (Kosunen, 2016, p. 5). Operationalising such an approach, Bowe et al. (1994) use the metaphor of a 'landscape of choice' to convey the social contexts and varied perspectives from which choices about education are made:

The experience of 'choice' is of a landscape that is neither flat nor unidimensional nor linear nor ordered nor tidy [...] Information is rarely complete, decisions often seem only to be 'the best that can be done', provisional and fragile. From where you stand aspects of the landscape may be 'out of sight', and moving across the landscape changes the 'way things look'. Decisions are made about the possibilities available on the basis of look, feel and judgement, as well as rational reflection.

(p. 75)

This conceptualisation of choice as a landscape allows for both a dynamic understanding of choice - that is, choice beyond the confines of economic rationality - and draws attention to the significance of choice processes for a developed understanding of choice outcomes. In contrast to a more linear model of choice that reduces choice-making to a set of discrete options and flowcharts, the notion of a choice landscape also does not imply that parents are irrational in their decision-making, but that the choice process comprises greater complexity than may be captured through the relatively narrow lens of traditional rational choice theory.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the economic theories underlying the neoliberal turn in education policy making that promote choice and competition as key ingredients in improving 'standards' and wider sectoral efficiency. This theoretical orientation has led some commentators to argue for quasi-market reforms in education that include education vouchers and other PPP models; others have also welcomed the growth of private markets in countries such as India and a consumer orientation in parents' engagement with schools.

However, empirical and theoretical insights from the philosophy of education and the sociology of education in India and elsewhere indicate that a market emphasis in educational policy making is problematic from an equality perspective. This includes the danger that privatisation may undermine education as a public or common good, as parents seek to gain relative advantages for their own children within a competitive system. That parents are differently advantaged within such

processes based on the resources that they have access to is also suggested by stratified patterns of school access according to socio-economic factors.

Indeed, new forms of social class stratification in India that may be serving to drive the rapid expansion of private, English-medium education indicate both the segregating effects of 'choice' and the need for an analysis of choice that is attentive to the socio-cultural meanings and values that may underlie particular educational decisions. Thus, to examine the implications of 'choice' for social equality, there is a need to attend to how parents distinguish between schools and how socio-cultural factors such as religion, gender, caste and class may come to bear within decision-making. Constraints in how choice preferences may be realised in practice are also important.

At the same time, assertions of the superior quality of private provision lack a firm empirical basis, promote a narrow conceptualisation of education quality based on quantifiable components, and rest on an interpretation of parental preferences that is based on narrow assumptions of economic rationality. While there is a significant gap in the literature concerning parental understandings of educational and school quality, and a similar gap concerning how parents gather market information and use this to inform schooling decisions, the available evidence suggests that parents do not always seem to behave within education markets in the way that rational choice assumptions would predict. This further underlines the limitations of a rational choice framework for interpreting schooling decisions, which also include inadequate attention to the role of parents as proxy consumers in education markets, the assumption of the singular, gender neutral consumer, and family dynamics of decision-making that are likely to shape choice preferences and outcomes. Thus, in contrast to a rational choice approach, this thesis posits an understanding of choice-making as both multi-dimensional and socially embedded, combining what might be rational elements with intuition, emotion and more unsystematic components. The methodological approach and theoretical resources that have been used in this study to develop this socio-cultural understanding are respectively outlined in the next two chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines, and explains the rationale for, the methodological approach and research methods employed in data collection and analysis for the current study. In addition to a technical reporting of the research methods, I also seek to provide a reflexive account of the research process during the main period of fieldwork, which took place over six months between September 2014 and February 2015.⁴¹ Moving away from an idealised depiction of how research is conducted (Walford, 1991), researcher reflexivity is a key source of validity and rigour in the research process, as Ball (1993b) explains:

[Reflexivity] allows the researcher to connect the processes of data analysis and data collection. It also provides the possibility of technical rigour in the ethnographic process. The basis of this rigour is the conscious and deliberate linking of the social process of engagement in the field with the technical processes of data collection and the decisions that that linking involves.

(p. 33)

As I discuss later in this chapter, my identity as a research student, a teacher, and someone who had previously worked with low fee private (LFP) schools in India, as well as my identity as a white, British woman, shaped the process of data collection and analysis in several respects. By examining my positionality - and that of my research assistants - I thus seek to follow Ball (1993b) by connecting the technical and the social in the reporting of the research methods.

⁴¹ See Appendix K for a fieldwork timeline.

The chapter begins by outlining the research questions (section 4.2), followed by an overview of the overall research strategy and design, including the development of, and justification for using, a nested, collective case study approach (section 4.3). This is followed by a detailed summary of the research process and methods of data collection (section 4.4). I then discuss how ethical issues were negotiated in the field (section 4.5), researcher positionality (section 4.6), the role of research assistants during fieldwork (section 4.7), and issues of language and translation (section 4.8). Finally, I outline the methods of data analysis (section 4.9).

4.2 Research questions

This research study was born from a desire to investigate how socially and economically disadvantaged households are navigating the increasingly diverse terrain of the contemporary education market, in order to interrogate the claims of choice advocates that school choice policies improve the educational opportunities available to socially and economically disadvantaged groups by providing enhanced access to a better-quality education. Hence a focus on the processes of choice-making – *why* choices were made and *how* families experienced choice – were central to the research design.

In view of this study aim, existing theoretical and empirical insights, and current gaps in knowledge relating to choice processes, the following research questions were devised:

1. What are the contexts in which households are making decisions about their children's education?
2. How do parents distinguish between schools?
3. How do parents experience and negotiate choice processes?
4. What are the consequences of increased marketisation in education for social equality?

The first research question should be understood as informed by Clarke's (2013) call for researchers to 'think contextually' across the social sciences disciplines and to avoid a reporting of the research findings that separates social action and agency

from the contexts in which they take place. As the review of the literature in Chapter 3 reveals, the existing school choice literature in India and that which has focused more specifically on the LFP sector, while illuminating segregated patterns of school enrolment with respect to gender, caste, locality (i.e. rural/urban), poverty, religion, and the intersections of these axes of social differentiation at national and state levels (e.g. Azam & Kingdon, 2013; Maitra et al, 2014; Bhattacharya et al, 2015), has tended to abstract 'choosers' from their immediate local and familial contexts. Building on such work, my attempt in this study is to focus attention on how the possibilities and enactment of choice by families are animated by the combination of multiple contexts – political, material, cultural, economic and so on – in which such choices are made at both the local and household level.

The second research question seeks to address a key gap in the research literature concerning parents' perceptions of different market providers. The decision to focus on how parents distinguish between schools should be understood as including a particular concern with parental conceptions of school quality, which, as outlined in Chapter 3, is currently a significant gap within the research literature, although often posited as a core driver behind the growth of the LFP sector and central to arguments for pro-market approaches to education reform (e.g. Tooley & Dixon, 2005). At the same time, in addition to quality, RQ2 is framed to incorporate non-quality aspects of perceived differences between schools, about which, as Muralidharan & Sundararaman (2015) note in relation to LFP schools, there is comparatively little existing empirical research. However, as outlined in Chapter 3, empirical insights from India and other national contexts have drawn attention to how perceptions of 'suitable' schooling options may be shaped by various aspects of social identity, such as class, caste and gender (e.g. Cucchiara & Horvat, 2014; Goswami, 2014; Kosunen et al., 2015; Kaur, 2017). Furthermore, sociological investigations of the consumption practices of India's middle classes have identified the dynamic relationship between social markers of class membership and educational aspirations (e.g. Fernandes, 2006). It is these socio-cultural aspects of perceived differences between providers (and particularly between government and private schools) that this research question aims to elucidate in order to better

understand both the construction of quality within the study settings, and how quality and non-quality factors may intersect to shape schooling preferences.

The third research question seeks to elucidate how parents both accommodate and resist structural constraints and inequalities. This reflects a recognition that understanding choice processes are an important part of understanding choice outcomes. This includes the more intimate aspects of power and choice, an increasing concern within studies of the family in India that have sought to investigate the impact of shifting societal gender norms on family structures and decision-making (e.g. Chaudhary, 2013) and an area to which this study aims in part to contribute. In addition, research in the sociology of education in a range of national contexts has revealed that limited school places and inequalities along class lines may significantly constrain the realisation of choice preferences within education markets (e.g. Gewirtz et al., 1995). Hence, how some choices may become 'thinkable' for some families and not for others, and the strategic work that parents may undertake when seeking to realise choice preferences is another concern encompassed within this research question. Related to this concern with strategic market engagement, the influence of the RtE Act 25% reservation, about which there has been little research to date, is a further aspect of the experience and negotiation of choice by households that should be understood as encompassed within this research question; that is, the extent to which and how families may be utilising such policy mechanisms to fulfil choice preferences.

Finally, the fourth research question seeks to link the proceeding research questions to the central concern of the study with issues of marketisation and social inequality. This focus is especially pertinent given recent policy discourses regarding parental 'participation' and 'choice' that indicate new responsibilities for parents as consumer-citizens to choose a school and to choose well both for their individual children and as a fulfilment of the state mandated right to education. Hence, the implications of decision-making at the household level for policy-makers, practitioners and for society more generally with respect to inequality and social justice concerns are an explicit focus of the study.

As noted in Chapter 1, the research aims for this study should be understood as descriptive, interpretative and evaluative. The study is descriptive in the sense of seeking to capture the local 'landscape of choice' (Bowe et al., 1994) and parents' accounts of the factors that influenced their decision-making within such contexts. Related closely to this aim, an interpretative dimension underlies the research questions in the attempt to apprehend meaning-making concerning parents' schooling decisions and the significance of choice related activities for families and individuals within the social environment. An evaluative element also underlies the research aims by connecting local level realities and lived experiences to evaluations of their implications for access, equality and 'choice' at the macro level.

Furthermore, explicit attention to contexts of decision-making and the development of research questions that are explicitly multi-scalar in approach – connecting decision-making within households to wider issues of marketisation with respect to social equality – should also be understood as deriving from the attempt to 'think contextually' in relation to all aspects of the research process, as Clarke (2013) encourages. As I explain in the next section of this chapter, attention to contexts (Clarke, 2013) and related understandings of space as socially produced underlie the research strategy and associated design for the study.

4.3 Research Strategy and Design

This study adopts a collective case study research design to investigate the decision-making processes of education market 'consumers' (parents/caregivers)⁴² at the lower end of the income spectrum. Parents' views and experiences within education markets lie at the heart of the research aims and associated research questions, and qualitative methods were adopted for gathering this data. However, to better understand the educational choices that parents make for their children and the 'landscape' in which this takes place, a case study approach also allowed other data to be collected to inform the analysis.

⁴² Referred to hereafter and throughout this thesis as parents for the sake of simplicity.

A collective case study research design was also adopted in view of how influences at different scales and those not bound by geography such as gender, religion and caste, may come to bear on decision-making. In this way, it was hoped that comparative analyses of similarities and differences between and across cases would support a richer understanding of decision-making at the household level and provide opportunities for theory building. The rationale for these decisions, the theoretical resources underlying the research design, and the selection of study sites are explained in the following sub-sections.

4.3.1 Why a qualitative approach?

In view of the research questions, themselves informed by my review of the existing literature as outlined in Chapter 3, a qualitative approach was considered best suited for capturing the experiences of parents within the education market and their meaning-making concerning choice processes. In broad terms qualitative researchers seek to understand how people understand their experiences of the world around them: ‘qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Moreover, as Creswell (2003) explains, qualitative research tends to focus on utilising the voices of participants and contextualising the settings in which they operate, which makes qualitative methods well-suited to exploring how households make sense of the education market.

By adopting a qualitative approach, the study sought to capture both the reasons for choices and, in exploring choice processes, the choice landscape via ‘the messy, multi-dimensional, intuitive and seemingly irrational or non-rational elements of choice [...] luck and chance [...] social relations, history, context, influences and doubt’ (Bowe et al., 1994, p. 74-75). To avoid the potential pitfalls of imposing pre-set criteria for decision-making *a priori* (such as quality, distance to school and fee level), it was hoped that a qualitative approach would allow unexpected issues or choice criteria to emerge. Semi-structured interviews with

parents were thus identified as an appropriate method for gathering this data to support an analysis attentive to how parents made meaning of their educational options, preferences and eventual choice outcomes.

Finally, in recognition that lower income parents have been the subject of negative stereotyping in policy and public discourses concerning schooling and choice (see section 2.4.3), a qualitative approach allowed for a focus on the voices of parents as key actors and stakeholders in education: 'At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth' (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). Thus, while the study draws upon some quantitative data concerning both schools and households, the study is concerned primarily to look 'beneath the surface of statistics at the social processes that have produced them' (Edwards, Fitts & Whitty, 1989, p. 180). The stories and experiences of parents thus form the bedrock of the study.

4.3.2 Why a case study approach?

Whilst technical definitions of case study research vary, in general terms case study research is concerned with gaining an in-depth understanding of phenomena that are embedded within a 'real-life' context (Yin 2003; Hartley, 2004). At an early stage in the research process, it was decided that a case study approach would be the most appropriate research strategy for several reasons. Firstly, Yin (2014) identifies that a case study approach is well suited to answering 'how' or 'why' questions, which aligns to the research aims and objectives of the current study. Secondly, both Yin (2014) and Stake (2005) explain that both qualitative and quantitative methods may be adopted within a case study. This flexibility allowed for different types of data to be gathered, including some descriptive statistics drawn from secondary school and household survey data, providing a richer account of the contexts in which parents were making decisions about their children's education. Thirdly, the selection of a case study approach was informed by existing research which has illuminated the dynamic nature of choice within contemporary education markets in India, as summarised in Chapters 2 and 3. The need for a holistic and flexible research

approach able to capture multiple, interacting variables, and the significance of contexts to the overall aims of the study, was thus apparent and a case study approach afforded the opportunity to explore household-decision-making as a social practice operating within the peculiarities and complexities of 'real-life', local market settings (Stake, 2006). However, traditional case study approaches have been criticised for the inadequate treatment of contexts (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017a). The nature of this criticism and how this has informed the study design is the subject of the following sub-section.

4.3.3 The significance of contexts: reconciling relational concepts of place within case study research

Various commentators have sought to define what constitutes a case, with foci including individuals, organisations and events (see Yin 2003). Whatever definition is adopted, several commentators place considerable emphasis on the necessity of 'bounding the case' (Yin, 2011, p. 33; see also Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003; Creswell, 2003). As Merriam (1998) puts it: '[T]he case is a thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries [...] If the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case' (p. 27). However, while the relationship between contexts and phenomena in case study research is recognised by some as interactional (Stake, 2006), some commentators have problematised the notion of bounding a case, arguing that this fails to take adequate account of a more dynamic understanding of culture and contexts, as Bartlett & Vavrus (2017a) explain:

We contend that boundaries are not found; they are made by social actors, including by researchers, whose demarcations can often seem quite arbitrary and can have the effect of sealing off the case hermetically from other places, times, and influences.

(p. 903)

This troubling of boundaries within case study research is informed by the work of critical geographers such as Massey (2005), who argues against 'spatial fetishism' (p. 191) and calls for a relational view of place, or the 'relations through which space is

constructed' (p. 101). Critiquing a purely spatial conception of place, Massey (1994) puts forward an alternative theory of place as produced from the intersections between social, cultural and economic relations:

Instead then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent.
(p. 28)

Based on such perspectives, Bartlett & Vavrus (2017a) propose that case study research should therefore aim to explore 'the historical and contemporary processes that have produced *a sense of* shared place, purpose, or identity' [emphasis in original] (p. 907). Furthermore, in contrast to a static notion of context, Bartlett & Vavrus (2017a) argue that 'settings are constituted by social activities and social interactions [...] context is made; it is relational and spatial' (p. 909).

Similarly, Clarke (2013) also draws on Massey (2005) to argue for the use of the terms *contexts* over context in social research, which challenges the mobilisation of context as merely theatrical backdrop and proposes a similarly relational understanding of place that 'make possible particular types of agent [...] and particular types of agency' (p. 26). Such attention to power relations between social agents in the constitution of place connects closely to Bourdieu's concept of 'field', or the social space in which actors are positioned relative to their habitus and possession of the various forms of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) (Bourdieu, 1986), which I draw on in the data analysis along with other theoretical perspectives that are similarly concerned with the dynamic relationship between social structures and individual agency.⁴³ Bowe et al.'s (1994) concept of a 'choice landscape' is similarly aligned to an understanding of place as relational and interactional, focusing attention on how such a landscape is not static, but dependent upon an agent's subjective perspective at any given moment. How

⁴³ See Chapter 5.

parents make meaning of local education markets in terms of perceived possibilities, boundaries and limitations may thus be understood as important for a developed understanding of their educational choices.

At the same time, while attempts to bind a case may obscure the broader contexts in which such choices are made, as Clarke (2013) points out, 'geography matters' (p. 23) in the sense of distinguishing between different locations. Thus, I use the term nested in reference to the research design to indicate how cases are geographically located and so 'nested within a series of larger spaces: neighbourhood, city, region, nation, and so on' (Clarke, 2013, p. 23). However, in view of relational understandings of space as previously outlined, I also expand Clarke's (2013) use of the term 'nested' to indicate explicitly that case sites are socially situated and produced through multiple layers of influence across different scales. In the reporting of the study findings this includes the influence of policy-making at macro and meso levels as enacted at the local level, as well as attention concerning how aspects of social identity such as caste that are not geographically bound but which find expression via choice in local contexts through the intersection with other social structures such as gender and class. Thus, there is not a clear delineation between the case and what might previously have been conceptualised as merely background detail, but a more dynamic constitution of educational possibilities that are situated (i.e. nested) within wider socio-cultural, economic, political, and material contexts.

In summary, a relational understanding of place informs the research design through the adoption of a nested case study approach, situating the educational choices of families within the socially constituted 'choice landscape' (Bowe et al., 1994) in which they were made. Such an approach also draws attention to the opportunities for comparison within the study design to better understand the nature and operation of choice within local market settings.

4.3.4 Why a comparative approach?

The emphasis on comparison within traditional case study approaches has tended to fall on the opportunity for replication as in experimental research for the purposes of predication, as Yin (2014) encourages: ‘consider multiple cases as one would consider multiple experiments – that is, to follow a “replication design”’ (p. 57). However, as Bartlett & Vavrus (2017a) point out, such a replication design implies the need for tightly bound units of analysis, or cases, to pursue this experimental agenda, which does not align well to a relational understanding of space and place.

In contrast to Yin (2014), Stake (1994) does not encourage a replication design, and expresses caution about the use of comparative case studies, arguing that this may lead to de-contextualisation thereby undermining the essential value of a case study approach: ‘Comparison is a powerful conceptual mechanism, fixing attention upon the few attributes being compared and obscuring other knowledge about the case’ (p. 242). In more recent publications, however, Stake (2006) acknowledges the value of multi-case study approaches for theory building and proposes that the subject of investigation in such research is the ‘quintain’, or the unit of analysis, which is then examined across cases: ‘It is the quintain that we seek to understand. We study what is similar and different about the cases to understand the quintain better’ (p. 7).

Although it is somewhat obscure, the concept of the quintain is useful in emphasising the attempt in comparative analysis to trace influences across cases. In this way, and in view of relational conceptions of place, I adopt a collective case study research design that is explicitly comparative in approach in seeking to examine choice processes (the quintain) within different local settings as nested within a larger market space in order to identify commonalities, differences and influences across and between cases. In doing so, while mindful of the problems associated with asserting claims of generalisability and representation in case study research (Stake, 1995), I concur with Bartlett & Vavrus (2017a) in emphasising how comparison may allow for greater transferability of the analysis to other cases and provide opportunities for theory building. In this way, through a comparative analysis

attentive to the contexts in which households were making choices for their children's education (RQ1) it was hoped that the study would provide new insights and support theory building regarding choice-making within households (RQ2 and RQ3), and further elucidate the implications of increased marketisation in education for social equality (RQ4).

4.3.5 Case study site selection: operationalising a nested approach in the research design

In contrast to a common approach within studies of school choice that involves selecting schools as case studies and through those schools accessing the parents who have chosen them, it was decided that cases would be defined by geographical area. This was for several reasons: firstly, to capture a wide range of experiences among parents, including those not currently accessing formal schooling for their children; secondly, to enable a detailed picture of local education markets to be developed from the perspective of parents, for example, in relation to perceived local available options and direct comparisons between providers; and thirdly, it was anticipated that going through schools might impede access to households (this issue is discussed further in section 4.4.1). Finally, rather than 'ring fencing' a group of schools and determining this as the local education market a priori, the study sought to build a picture of the education market from the perspective of households, in line with a relational understanding of place that is attentive to 'how boundaries perceived by participants come to be meaningful' (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017a, p. 905). For example, while the necessity of identifying areas from where participants could be recruited was apparent from a practical perspective (see section 4.3.3), it was supposed that perceptions of education market boundaries would vary between households, as proved to be the case.

In line with the approach outlined by Walford (2001), the selection of study sites was guided by theoretical interest, as well as practical considerations. Given the focus of the study on the contemporary education landscape, it was decided that the study should focus on urban settings where it was thought likely that the market

would be active in terms of the number and type of providers. A nested approach within a single municipality also offered opportunities for focusing on local dynamics of choice without adding further layers of complexity, for example rural/urban dynamics, within the relatively modest confines of the study. Accordingly, Delhi was selected as the broader location in which single study sites would be nested within, further guided by my prior knowledge of the city and the likelihood of being able to locate low income households with access to a range of schools within the local vicinity. In addition, while Delhi was one of the first sites in the country to implement the RtE Act, a 2004 Supreme Court order stipulated that the Delhi government should enforce contracts with private school providers allotted government land at concessionary rates to institute subsidised places for low income students (Juneja, 2005),⁴⁴ in theory enhancing school choice for low income households prior to the introduction of the RtE Act in 2009.

Initially, I decided to focus research efforts on two study sites within the city, judging that this was reasonable in terms of feasibility for one researcher within the main period of fieldwork (September 2014 – February 2015). Case selection was guided by conditions for inclusion, as well as criteria to establish variation between cases in view of Stake's (2006) guidance regarding case selection in any multi-case study design:

- Is the case relevant to the quintain (i.e. the unit of analysis)?
- Do the cases provide diversity across contexts?
- Do the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts?

(p. 23)

⁴⁴ Many such contracts date back to the early 1960s, but until 2004 it was not common knowledge that such a clause existed, or that private schools had been allotted land at 'throwaway prices' (Juneja, 2005, p. 3687).

Table 4.1 Case study selection criteria

Criteria for inclusion	Criteria for variation
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Predominance of lower income families residing in the area (at least 500 households)⁴⁵ 2. A range of schools and school types in the local area (c. 1km radius)⁴⁶ 3. Researcher knowledge of the area and connections to local contacts able to help facilitate access to households/schools 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Government school types (e.g. all-through, lower primary only, selective admissions) 2. Private school types (lower to higher fee; aided and unaided) 3. Location (unlikely to be significant overlap between market areas)

Thus, case sites were selected to provide comparative analytic opportunities and to allow opportunities to examine the importance of contexts with respect to choice-making in view of the study's overall aims and associated research questions.

Given the focus of the study on lower income households, data used to inform case selection included the Delhi Urban Shelter Improvement Board (DUSIB)⁴⁷ list of recognised, non-notified slums,⁴⁸ also known as Jhuggi Jhopri Clusters (JJC)s.⁴⁹ DUSIB data includes boundary maps, which, notwithstanding the criticisms of boundaries within case study research outlined in section 4.3.3, allowed participant recruitment efforts to be focused within clusters. While official data is likely to be incomplete due to the unofficial nature of such settlements, DUSIB maps also included rough estimates of the number of households in each site.

⁴⁵ This was judged sufficient to allow for several households with elementary school age children or accessing elementary schooling to be recruited for the study. This also excluded very small, temporary settlements, for example at roadsides, where access to schooling is likely to be negligible.

⁴⁶ This radius was judged to be a walkable distance (not considering barriers such as main roads) and thus a reasonable demarcation of 'local'.

⁴⁷ Government agency responsible for the oversight of all slum areas in Delhi.

⁴⁸ Non-notified slums are squatter settlements, built without planning permission on private or government owned land and do not have the same legal entitlements to public services as resettlement colonies and notified (i.e. legally recognised) slum residents.

⁴⁹ Jhuggi Jhopri is a term for a small, self-constructed dwelling.

In conceptualising the nature of the middle class in India, Fernandes (2006) and others have pointed to the significance of the role played by locality in the formation of class identity. In contrast to middle-class living spaces in Delhi, while not all households living within slums fall below the poverty line (Mitra, 2003), the Delhi JJC population should be understood as of a lower socio-economic status than non-slum dwellers (Tsujita, 2014). Income levels were expected to vary within and between clusters, but it was anticipated that most households living in established JJsCs would have an income of less than or close to Rs. 100,000 per year (or Rs. 8,333 per month),⁵⁰ would be employed in occupations ranging from daily wage work to skilled manual labour,⁵¹ and would typically be thought of as the clientele group for government schools, with perhaps the spending power to access some LFP schools. Thus, while not necessarily exclusively the very lowest income group, households would be at the lower end of the income range among households in Delhi and thus the sample group of interest in view of the research aims.

My knowledge of the city and areas with which I was already familiar led me to select a JJC in East Delhi as a potential case prior to arrival in the field. However, discussions with ‘experienced and knowledgeable experts’ (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994) and local contacts after my arrival in Delhi led me to shortlist two further JJsCs in South Delhi. With the support of a research assistant who acted as an interpreter,⁵² I visited the shortlisted sites to conduct a rough mapping of schools and to scope out the local area.

The scoping exercise identified that the two South Delhi localities (hereafter Location A and Location B) afforded variation in school types between and across

⁵⁰ The Government of Delhi benchmark for households classed as belonging to Economically Weaker Sections (EWS). EWS households are eligible for a range of education subsidies, including free uniform and books in government schools up until Class VIII and free admission to private schools under the RtE Act 25% reservation.

⁵¹ In a survey of 864 households across 27 JJsCs in Delhi, Bag, Seth & Gupta (2016) found that 90% of workers were employed in informal jobs, earning an average of Rs. 7,089 per month. A further 6% were working in contract jobs earning an average of Rs. 9,860 per month, while 4% were working in government jobs earning an average of Rs. 14,798 per month. This data reflects other relatively recent surveys of JJsCs in Delhi, which have identified an average monthly income of Rs. 7,748 (Centre for Global Development Research, 2011).

⁵² The role that research assistants played within the study is discussed in section 4.8.

each site, as well as some variation in the social makeup of households; for example, one part of Location B was intertwined with government Type-1 living quarters,⁵³ providing some range in the economic circumstances of households.⁵⁴ In addition, relationships to NGO contacts afforded the opportunity to access secondary household survey data covering each *basti*,⁵⁵ which provided useful background information in this way supporting purposive sampling efforts.⁵⁶ Thus, both South Delhi sites were selected as cases, fitting the overall study criteria for inclusion, variation between cases, and the practical requirements of the study.

In addition, a small number of interviews were conducted with parents in the original JJC in East Delhi (hereafter Location C) to enable further comparison across the data set based on the findings in Locations A and B. In particular, in addition to there being a range of government and private schools in the area, Location C was known to be home to a relatively higher proportion of Muslim households, a group whose experiences in accessing schooling are known to be influenced by their religious status (Gol, 2006; Sarangapani & Winch, 2010). The inclusion of Location C thus allowed for emerging trends in the data identified within Locations A and B to be considered within a different local educational landscape. In this way, it was hoped that enhanced comparative opportunities (i.e. identifying similarities and differences between case sites) would better support the explanatory power of the overall analysis. The decision to include a third case site also aligns with Bartlett & Vavrus' (2017b) guidance that case study research should be iterative in approach, modifying the research design in response to data collection and analysis.

Thus, the final research design comprised three case sites, comprising different local market settings, all nested within a broader market context of the city,

⁵³ Allocated to Tier 4 workers, the lowest paid on the government pay scale (e.g. drivers). Homes are single storey and comprise a living room, bedroom, kitchen, toilet and utility area.

⁵⁴ Detailed descriptions of each case study site and their respective local education markets are provided in Chapter 6.

⁵⁵ I have chosen the word *basti* hereafter to refer to each local area as this was the term used by residents across study sites. I also made this choice because of the loaded nature of the term 'slum' and its inadequacy in expressing the variety of living conditions across and within areas.

⁵⁶ The database that I was granted access to did not include identifying information at the household level and was not used for direct recruitment, but rather to gain a sense of the social makeup of each *basti* (see section 4.4.4).

itself nested within a series of larger spaces and contextual dynamics at national, regional and global levels.

4.4 Methods of data collection

In this section I outline the methods of data collection, which took place between September 2014 and February 2015, and a two-week period in June 2015. A fieldwork timeline is provided in Appendix K.

Broadly defined, qualitative research gathers data from observations, interviews, informal verbal interactions and documents, and focuses on the meanings and interpretations of the participants (Holloway, 1997). However, whilst this study remains grounded in a qualitative approach, it also draws upon some quantitative data to illuminate key aspects of the wider educational and socio-economic contexts. This is in line with a case study approach, which allows the researcher to explore an identified phenomenon in context using a variety of data sources. As Baxter & Jack (2008) explain: 'the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood' (p. 544). This had the advantage of allowing for the collection of a range of data from a variety of sources and hence for data to be appropriately triangulated: 'triangulation is a powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research' (Campbell & Fiske, 1959, cited in Cohen et al., 2000, p.112). For example, the mapping of schools in each vicinity was developed through household interviews and field observations, as well as secondary household survey data, District Information System for Education (DISE) data, and maps of assembly constituencies.

Table 4.2 Methods of data collection

Methods of data collection	Source	Research Questions
Semi-structured interviews	Households (i.e. parents) Education professionals (school-based staff, private tutors and NGO workers)	RQ1-4
Field notes	Observations Informal conversations Photographs	RQ1-4
Written texts	Government documents (e.g. directives; policies; notices; department mandates; assembly maps) School documents (e.g. admission materials and information; fee notices; school rules)	RQ1, RQ3, RQ4
Secondary survey data	Household survey data (NGO) ⁵⁷ School survey data (DISE)	RQ1

4.4.1 Semi-structured interviews and participant recruitment

In line with the aims of the research study detailed in section 4.2, semi-structured interviews with household representatives were the primary focus of data collection efforts. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of education professionals (school-based staff, private tutors and NGO workers) to develop a more detailed understanding of educational services offered, differences between providers, admission procedures, and the relationship between institutions and households.

The number of interviews was limited by the practical constraints of time and person power but was sufficient to provide valuable insights into parental choice

⁵⁷ As I discuss in section 4.4.4, this data set was used to provide an initial insight into the socio-economic characteristics and schooling options of households in Locations A and B, but was not otherwise incorporated into the data analysis due to validity and reliability concerns.

processes (see Table 4.3). A comparatively smaller number of participants were interviewed in Location A than Location B due to the smaller size of the population and there being less variety in schooling options across households in Location A. After 20 interviews, it was judged that the main patterns with respect to schooling decisions and experiences in the local education market had been identified. In Location B, the broader range of schooling options meant that this level of data saturation was not judged to have been reached until 30 interviews. A small number of interviews were conducted in Location C towards the end of fieldwork, as opposed to conducting additional interviews in Locations A and B, because the characteristics of Location C meant that issues relating to social identity could be explored further, and further enhancing comparative opportunities within the study as a whole (see section 4.3.3).

Table 4.3 Number of interviews

Interviews	Location			
	A	B	C	All
Households	20	30	8	58
School-based staff ⁵⁸	1	4	1	6
Private tutors	3	2	1	6
NGO workers	2	3	0	5
Total	26	39	10	75

Source: household interviews

4.4.1a Interviews with households

Parents living in each locality with at least one child of elementary school age (ages 5-14)⁵⁹ or currently accessing school at the elementary level were eligible to take part in the study. The criteria for participation were kept relatively broad so that participant recruitment was not limited unduly, but the elementary stage was

⁵⁸ Comprising four principals, a vice-principal and a school administrative officer.

⁵⁹ The RtE Act stipulates the elementary stage as ages 6-14; however, admission to Class I in Delhi schools may be from age 5 (DoE Delhi, 2012).

decided upon as the focus of the study given that this is the period of free and compulsory education in India under the RtE Act.⁶⁰ I also decided not to focus on a set point of transition, such as between the lower and upper primary stages (Class V to Class VI), again so as not to restrict recruitment efforts and because several schools in each vicinity (as in Delhi more generally) were all-through schools from Class I - Class XII, meaning that children may not have transitioned to a different school at this point in time. Previous research studies have also identified a trend towards frequent school changes within the elementary stage (James & Woodhead, 2014; Srivastava, 2008), suggesting that a more flexible approach was required to capture the dynamic nature of school exit and choice across the study sites.

In terms of recruiting household participants, insights from experienced researchers early in the research design process suggested potential difficulties in approaching families through schools (school-led sampling). These difficulties included the risk of the researcher being steered towards households at the discretion of school officials. In addition, households might have been less inclined to be open regarding their school experiences because of the worry of reprisals against their children. Going through school institutions would also presuppose which schools were being accessed by low income families, and exclude families not accessing any form of schooling. Finally, it was anticipated that access to some schools may have been difficult to secure.⁶¹ Ultimately, I encountered difficulties in recruiting school staff for interviews during fieldwork, which reaffirmed my decision not to pursue school-led sampling.

It was anticipated that recruiting participants would be extremely challenging without introductions from some form of gatekeeper, such as a local NGO working in the area. However, I felt that going through such an organisation also posed an ethical dilemma, as I worried that participants might feel compelled to speak to me or have expectations about what they might receive in exchange for doing so if introductions came from a known NGO that people associated with service provision.

⁶⁰ The schooling of older and younger children did arise in interviews, given that this played a role in shaping parents' schooling decisions for children within the elementary stage.

⁶¹ See Jain (in press) and Noronha & Srivastava (2013), who describe difficulties gaining access to schools in Delhi by academic researchers.

There was also the danger that some NGOs might have negative associations that might limit access to other participants within the area. Indeed, during fieldwork it was frequently assumed by new people I met that I was working for an NGO and it often took considerable time to assure them that I was in fact a student and that this work was my own project. Therefore, after identifying these issues when initially scoping study sites, I decided to try visiting each basti independently.

With the help of research assistants, I began recruitment efforts by approaching people in public areas of the basti (the main walkways, outside shops, or areas where a few people were sitting), explaining who I was, what the study was about and asking if they would be willing to be interviewed. From an early stage, I found that my obvious outsider status had an unexpected benefit: people were naturally curious about who I was and why I was there, so often approached me directly. This gave me a much-needed 'in' to starting initial conversations. If after learning about the study people were interested in being interviewed, I was then able to arrange a follow-up appointment and visit the area more strategically (i.e. go straight from home-to-home without wandering around so publicly). In time, contacts with other potential participants were made largely through snowballing and I found that I attracted less attention the more times that I visited each area, spending several hours per day in at least one of the case sites.

I targeted purposive recruitment efforts to ensure that I captured the variety of schools that households in the area were accessing. I also tried to ensure some variety in household characteristics such as the states from which households had originally migrated, the length of time households had lived in the area, occupations, and religion. Potential participants were always asked where they would like to be interviewed and the majority chose their homes, either inside or in an outside area. However, ensuring privacy was an ongoing challenge given the nature of the research environment. Interruptions were relatively common, especially if the interview was being conducted outside and passers-by came to ask who I was and what I was doing there. As time went on, I became much more adept at handling these interruptions, asking if I could come and visit them after I had finished my

current interview. In all cases, participants seemed entirely unconcerned by such interruptions from a privacy perspective.

Prior to commencing fieldwork, I was advised by NGO contacts familiar with the social contexts of the study sites that I should aim to prioritise interviews with fathers as the ‘ultimate’ decision makers within households. Whilst this did not affect my recruitment strategy, I was mindful of the role that gender was likely to play in household decision-making processes in view of the existing research literature concerning changing familial dynamics in contemporary Indian society and the role of mothers in choice-processes (see section 3.4.4). In terms of household participants, most interviews were with mothers, but there was a more even gender split in Location B and in Location C where I recruited relatively more fathers.⁶² Some interviews were joint, either with both parents, or with one parent and another family member, and in three instances a family member other than a parent was interviewed (a grandmother, an uncle and an aunt) as each was identified as the child’s main caregiver. A list of all household interviewees including schools accessed and available demographic information is provided in Appendix M.

Table 4.4: Number of household interviews

Interviews	Location			
	A	B	C	All
Mother	13	15	3	31
Father	2	12	2	16
Other family member (main caregiver)	2	0	1	3
Joint (parents)	2	2	2	6
Joint (parent with another family member)	1	1	0	2
Total	20	30	8	58

Source: household interviews

Interviews lasted an average of 45 minutes. However, it is important to point out that occasionally interruptions ended an interview prematurely, such as when

⁶² The issue of gender in participant recruitment efforts is discussed further in section 4.7. I also discuss the role of mothers as key decision makers within some households in Chapter 8.

children arrived home from school; in a small number of instances (two in Location A and two in Location B), fights that had broken out in the nearby vicinity truncated interviews. In Location B, the railway line also presented a particular challenge to the interview 'flow', as some interviews had to be halted while trains passed by. In cases where I faced these challenges, I returned at a later date to continue the interview, wherever possible.

A semi-structured approach to interviews was considered appropriate to maintain focus on key areas of research interest while still enabling parents to tell their stories regarding decision-making for their children's education.⁶³ In view of the limitations of a rational choice framework for understanding schooling decisions as outlined in Chapter 3, I did not structure the interviews around a pre-set list of reasons for particular educational choices in this way to pre-suppose their overall rationale for particular decisions, although I did consider a few possible prompts in this respect.

In terms of interview themes, given 'pro-market' arguments regarding the superior quality of the LFP sector as a key driver behind the growth of private provision in India (see section 3.3.2), I was particularly interested in parents' conceptions of school and educational quality, linked to what they saw as the overall purpose of formal education for their children's lives, as well as what they saw as the differences between private and government schools (if any). Thus, issues of education purpose, quality, perceived differences between providers and the information sources used to inform these perceptions formed core themes within the interview schedule, as driven by the research questions, to gather rich qualitative data concerning how parents negotiated their role as 'consumers' within local education markets.

Similarly informed by the research questions, interview questions around parents' educational experiences, family background and perceived limitations to choice were also included to understand and to enable an analysis of how parents made meaning of educational options and constraints. Given theories of consumer

⁶³ The language barrier between myself and interviewees was also a consideration in this respect (see section 4.9).

behaviour, and particularly that parents would exit a school perceived as poor quality (see section 3.2.2), a further theme in interviews was parental satisfaction and parents' ongoing relationship with schools (e.g. frequency of and reflections on school visits, talking to teachers and so on), as part of the negotiation of choice in the market (RQ3). Questions concerning family roles in choice-making processes were further informed by the focus on examining the negotiation of choice within the home (RQ3), in view of the family sociology literature that has illuminated the importance of family dynamics to choice-making (see section 3.4.4). Specific questions concerning private tuitions, school-management committees, frequent school changes and the RtE Act 25% reservation were also included as these had arisen as key issues in the existing research and policy literature concerning children's education and choice as outlined in Chapters 2 and 3. Thus, the interview schedule was informed by the existing literature and the research questions in seeking to capture data regarding the contexts in which choices were being made (RQ1), how parents distinguished between schools (RQ2), their experience and negotiation of choice (RQ3), and key issues concerning social equality (RQ4).

Prior to entering the field, I reviewed my draft interview schedule with a few key informants (experienced researchers and NGO workers) for some feedback on issues that were likely to pose difficulties in translation and interpretation. I also piloted the interview schedule with five participants in a different locality in east Delhi that was facilitated by an NGO who worked with families in the local area (this was in the early days of field work prior to case selection).⁶⁴ This led me to reordering a few questions, as the flow of my original schedule felt a little odd when done 'out loud', and developing a series of prompts around the idea of school quality, a key theme within interviews because of the debates surrounding private school quality and the theorised relationship between choice-competition and quality in a marketised system, as outlined in Chapter 3. For example, several parents commented that they did not know what a good school was or what good education looked like as they had had no experience of formal education themselves. Whilst

⁶⁴ These pilot interviews are not included in the final data set.

this was an important response in and of itself, the prompt questions served to draw parents into further discussion and to encourage them to share their opinions.

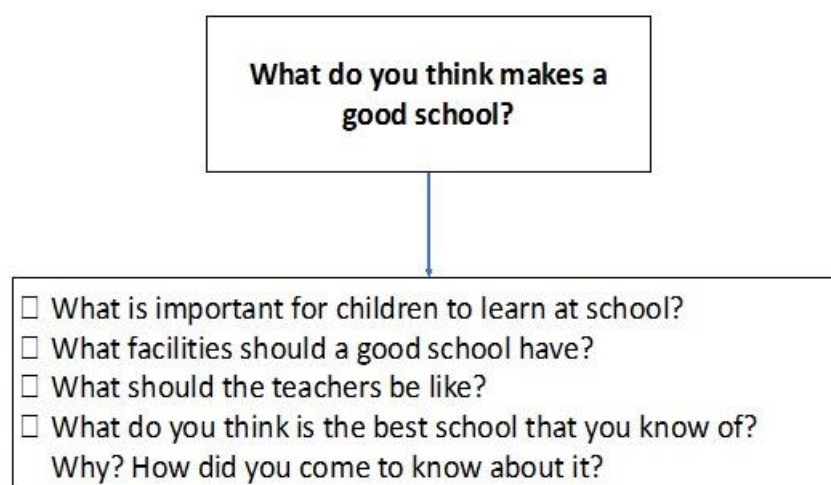


Figure 4.1 School quality prompt questions

Thus, the interview schedule reflected the aims of the study and research questions in terms of key themes that were explored. In all cases, the research schedule was used as a guide only; sometimes questions were asked in a different order depending on how parents co-shaped the interviews, or additional questions were asked depending on topics that arose. For example, issues of safety and security were mentioned by several participants across all sites and thus became an area that I probed further with some interviewees (see Appendix A for the final interview schedule).

4.4.1b Interviews with educational professionals

For the semi-structured interviews with 'education professionals' (NGO workers, private tutors and school-based staff),⁶⁵ NGO workers were identified and recruited through a mixture of introductions from pre-existing contacts and direct approach once I had learned about their work from people in the local area. Interviews were

⁶⁵ See footnote 58 (p. 121).

conducted in their place of work, or in a quiet public place in the local area. Private tutors were identified through parent interviews and then approached directly with a request for an interview. In all but two instances, interviews with tutors took place at their homes, which were also where they held tuition classes.⁶⁶

Interviews with school-based staff took place in the school in question (two government, three private unaided and one private aided). In all cases, the school was visited by the researcher and a request made for an appointment with the principal. This sometimes led to an appointment, or to a referral to other staff within the school. At most schools that were approached in all case sites, requests for an interview were refused either through avoidance (not responding to requests for an interview), or more directly, sometimes by gatekeepers such as reception staff. Staff who agreed to a formal interview did not refuse to answer any questions outright, but the majority were guarded and evasive in their responses, and all but one declined to be recorded.

Informed by the research questions and the importance of developing a contextual understanding of each locality, all education professionals were asked about the nature of their work, fees (if applicable), admission policies, recruitment strategies, as well as their views regarding the local area and other providers in the area (see Appendix B for the final interview schedule). Given the interest of the study in parental choice-making, educational professionals were also asked about their views as to the reasons for parents' choice of school and, related to this, their views regarding the purpose of education and where they saw children in their care doing in the future. A list of these interview participants is provided in Appendix L.

4.4.2 Written texts

To supplement the interviews with school-based staff, and to fill gaps in cases where school staff had declined to be interviewed, I gathered a range of publicly available school-based documents. These included general admission forms for entry to

⁶⁶ One interview took place in a private room inside a Hindu temple located in the basti. Another interview was conducted in a tuition centre that was not the tutor's home.

private schools under the RtE Act, as well as a small number of school specific documents relating to admissions that were available online. In addition, I was allowed unprompted access to some school documents by households (fee receipts and school diaries), although this was only to take notes from rather than to take away.

National, state and district level government documents were downloaded from the websites of the relevant government agency or were bought from bookshops. Specific areas of interest throughout were issues of access, admissions, choice, parents, the private sector, and socially and economically disadvantaged groups. Documents gathered included reimbursement notices regarding various government welfare schemes and directive notices issued to schools by DoE Delhi, among many others. It should be noted that all government and school-based documents were found to be in English, so there was no need for the translation of written texts.

4.4.3 Field notes

In line with Bryman & Bell's (2011) summary of field note types, field notes taken during the project comprised of: mental notes, elaborated later when out of the field; scratch notes, jotted down during time in the area/schools or in informal interactions; and, detailed notes of conversations and observations. When appropriate, I also took photographs of the local area, posters advertising private tuitions services, school signs, and other 'reminders' to support more developed field notes to be written at a later stage. In interviews with participants, I wrote very detailed notes and used the margins of my notebooks for additional 'scratch notes' that I sometimes went back to with a different coloured pen at the end of the day to develop further. These field notes contained both literal descriptions of the events witnessed (emic data) as well as personal reactions to these events (etic data) (Gay & Airasian, 2003). I also asked my research assistants to share with me their field notes after early visits to each basti; I did not collect their written field notes from subsequent visits due to the huge amount of work that this would have entailed, but I took my own notes during debrief sessions.

4.4.4 Quantitative data

Two sources of numerical data were used to complement data collection efforts. It is important to note that due to concerns about data reliability and validity, neither data set was used to inform data collection efforts directly and neither was used for the purposes of statistical analysis. However, in the absence of any other data concerning either household characteristics or schools across all localities, both data sets provided some useful insights during fieldwork when developing a ‘picture’ of each locality and the surrounding education landscape.

The first data set used was the DISE database, which is a publicly available school information system coordinated by the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA). Individual school reports are searchable by district and contain school-level data such as enrolment figures and number of teachers. However, DISE data are known to be of mixed accuracy, including the known phenomenon of over reporting student enrolment figures (Kingdon, 2007; Shukla & Joshi, 2008; Kingdon, 2017). In one government school in Location C, for example, the reported number of incentives provided for children from disadvantaged backgrounds was found to exceed the number of children reported as enrolled.⁶⁷ Missing fields were also identified in some cases, such as the number of teachers at the elementary level. In addition, whilst the DISE data set at the national level includes data for unrecognised private schools, it was known that such schools were not included in the Delhi DISE data set.⁶⁸ Fee information is also not included for the recognised private schools covered by DISE. Therefore, the DISE data, which was the only available resource for gathering school-level data such as enrolment figures, was used to complement other data collected in building up a ‘picture’ of the number and type of local providers within each case (i.e. the school-mix) rather than for the purposes of statistical analysis.

The second source of quantitative data was household survey data from an

⁶⁷ Incentive schemes at the elementary level include free stationary and uniforms for SC/ST/OBC, girls and minority students attending government schools.

⁶⁸ Comptroller Auditor General (2017) also note the difficulty of mapping schools in Delhi due to incomplete government data.

international NGO with operations in India. Data was collected in early September 2014 by programme staff with experience of conducting similar household surveys. However, it is important to make clear that I cannot be confident about the reliability and validity of this process. The survey included questions regarding household income, adult occupations, education levels, mother tongue language and state of origin. In addition, there was a second section that covered education: number of children in the household; school(s) accessed; and, fee level (if applicable). Households were surveyed at random, but data was only collected for households with children ages 3 - 10. The sample size of each basti was 96 in Location A and 102 in Location B (the pre-determined sample size had been 100 households for each location; the full survey encompassed several other locations in South Delhi). Through my pre-existing relationship with the organisation in question, I secured access to an anonymised version of the data set. In the absence of any other data concerning the case sites, this data set proved extremely useful in helping to build a 'picture' of the local education landscape and in informing recruitment efforts regarding household level participants, as I had some idea of the range of household income levels, occupations and 'home' states that I sought to capture across my own sample. For example, the data set indicated that Location B was home to several residents from South India, which, while it did not affect my recruitment strategy, I was aware of when I began recruiting participants. The data set was also useful in school mapping efforts, as I had an initial idea of what schools were in the surrounding area and/or were being accessed by households in the locality.

However, it should be stressed that this data was used to provide an initial, richer understanding of the local contexts of decision-making in Locations A and B rather than for the purposes of generalisability or to be incorporated in the data analysis. Thus, I did not conduct statistical modelling or seek to draw analytic conclusions using this data. Accordingly, I refer to this data in only a very limited way in my description of each case site and do so only with considerable caution without seeking to link this data to schooling choices and to the parent chooser typologies that are introduced in Chapter 7.

4.5 Ethics

This research study was carried out with Ethical Approval from King's College London (reference: REP/13/14-82). In addition to the university's guidelines, I also drew upon the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) ethical guidelines for educational research at the time of fieldwork (BERA, 2011). This chapter has already touched on a range of ethical issues that arose at different stages of the research process. However, it is also important to include in-depth reflections on research ethics across the study as an integral part of the research process, as well as to reflect on specific issues that were encountered during fieldwork.

As it was known that a large proportion of parents were likely to be functionally illiterate, potential participants were given a verbal introduction to and explanation of the project. However, potential participants were also offered a copy of the information sheet in Hindi to take away if they wished, which included contact telephone numbers. The same approach was taken with other potential participants (education professionals), who were offered an information sheet in either English or Hindi and given a verbal explanation of the project. In all cases, participants were included in the study only after informed consent had been obtained, which was done verbally except when the potential participant's literacy level was known to me beforehand (for example, because we had exchanged emails). It was explained to participants that they were free to stop the interview at any time, not to answer any questions that they did not want to, and to pull out of the study after the interview without having to give a reason. In addition, participants were assured that their information would be stored securely and that all identifying details would be changed. All participants were also given the chance to ask any questions before giving their consent and in all cases these were answered fully and honestly. As already explained, some participants consented to the interview, but declined consent for the interview to be audio recorded. In such cases, I decided to go ahead with the interview as I did not want to pressure participants into this nor to exclude these people from the study given the valuable insights that they would still be able to offer.

In choosing to conduct field research in India, I was aware of the necessity of reflecting on the ethical issues of doing so in the context of colonial history:

Conducting international fieldwork involves being attentive to histories of colonialism, development, globalisation and local realities, to avoid exploitative research or perpetuation of relations of domination and control.

(Sultana, 2007, p. 375)

I was mindful of my status as a white British foreigner, how this might be perceived by potential participants, and how this would come to bear on the research process. For example, I was keenly aware that some people might agree to take part in the study out of politeness, or an implied social pressure when they did not fully understand all aspects of the study or the consent process. Gaining informed consent was therefore not attained by listening for a 'Yes' and ticking a box on a form, but in being fully assured that participants did truly understand what they were agreeing to. One way that this was done was by looking for signs of discomfort through body language or speech during our exchanges, which my research assistants were also able to advise on. I was also careful to check that all participants were happy after the interview had taken place and asked them if they had any concerns about taking part.⁶⁹ Some potential participants did decline to take part in the research project, either through explicit refusal or avoidance (not returning emails or phone calls), either at the first stage of explaining the project or during the process of seeking informed consent. In part, this refusal demonstrated the exercise of power and agency (Sultana, 2007) and I took it as a reassurance that in general people did not feel compelled to talk to me. After the main period of fieldwork (September 2014 – February 2015), I also returned to the study sites on a few occasions over a two-week period in June 2015 on a return visit to India.⁷⁰ During this visit, I met a few participants who I had interviewed, all of whom recognised me

⁶⁹ No participants expressed any concerns following the interviews and none asked for any or all of their data to be removed from the study.

⁷⁰ See Appendix K. During this time, I conducted interviews with some NGO participants and undertook further school mapping work. However, because of time constraints, I did not conduct formal follow-up interviews with parents, but instead 'checked in' with anyone that I came across in an informal way.

and were friendly during our catch-up conversations. I hope that this means that no one regretted having talked to me and I have no reason to believe that this was the case.

A few weeks into the data collection process, I also developed a 'Frequently Asked Questions' working document as a reference tool for myself and my research assistants (it was not distributed to potential participants). This was very useful in codifying very simple, clear responses to common questions and as a tool for reflection on associated ethical issues with my research assistants. Indeed, despite careful planning, ethical issues and questions arose during fieldwork that had not been fully anticipated. Some of the main issues encountered are outlined in the following sections.

4.5.1 'Are you with an NGO?'

As already mentioned earlier in this chapter, I had decided against drawing on NGO contacts to gain access to households because of ethical concerns. These included experiences from early visits to each field site when it became clear that I was generally understood as working for an NGO (I was not with any NGO representative at the time). This was often followed by requests for help, or sometimes complaints about perceived poor treatment from NGOs who worked in the area. As a result, I decided not to use my NGO contacts to access households, as I was concerned that potential participants might be under the impression that speaking to me would enable them to avail themselves of goods and/or services.

Despite 'going it alone' in each area, time needed to be spent explaining in very clear terms that I was not with an NGO, but was a student and, moreover, that the research would not lead to any material change in the lives of participants or their children; to do otherwise would have been disingenuous. After realising that my being with an NGO would be a common misconception, I was careful that my student identity was one of the first things that was explained to any potential participant and I sometimes showed my student photo ID card if I felt that this would be helpful.

4.5.2 Privacy

Due to the nature of the research environment, privacy was a key issue throughout the research process. I knew that my presence would be observed when I was in each locality (even when the overt stares or approaches died down as the study went on) and that I could not ensure anonymity within the immediate area of people's homes in terms of neighbours knowing who I had spoken to. It is also the nature of such localities that dwellings are very close together and that walls and/or doorways are not necessarily solid or soundproof. However, lack of anonymity in this sense was also equally explicit to research participants and did not seem to be a cause of any concern.

Once people had expressed an initial interest in taking part, all participants were asked when and where would be most convenient for them for the interview to take place so that they would have control over privacy boundaries. The majority chose their homes, but some chose a common area in the basti, or an area outside of their home. In some instances, I requested that we move to a quieter place because of background noise and participants were always happy to do so. During the considerable time I spent in each basti during fieldwork, I did not hear of anyone experiencing any negative impact from having talked to me. In addition, when some people commented that they had heard of me and/or seen me around the basti, I was encouraged that they were open to speaking with me and to be interviewed.

It should be noted that some details that I would have liked to have included in the data analysis and description of each case site have been excluded to preserve anonymity. In addition to adopting pseudonyms for all research participants, I have thought carefully about what details beyond name and map location might make the bastis or their inhabitants identifiable and have been mindful that changing names does not necessarily ensure anonymity. Consequently, I have changed some identifying information for a very small number of schools in each locality to preserve anonymity. Except for the years that certain schools were established, no information has been changed for schools that were accessed by families that I interviewed. The information that I have changed does not impact on my presentation of the research findings, or on my analysis.

4.5.3 Risk of undue imposition

During the research process, I was very aware of the potential for making undue demands on participants, particularly at the household level. My concern around this was heightened in early conversations with potential participants, when several asked if I was there to do a survey, which was clearly a familiar activity. There was, therefore, a risk of adding to a general feeling of 'survey fatigue' despite the study not actually using survey tools. Other than being focused during interviews so as not to waste people's time, this meant being careful to fit in around the schedules and lives of participants. Fitting into participants' daily lives also meant being attuned to signals that the participant needed to 'get on', such as children arriving home from school.

When it was emphasised that I would not be using a form to ask questions, but that what I wanted was to have a conversation to hear their views and experiences, people often responded to this very positively. For some participants, speaking with me was a change from their day-to-day work that they welcomed. I was once speaking to three women after having interviewed one of them in her home. The brother of one woman came in and asked who I was and what they were doing talking to me; this was not done in an aggressive way, but rather he was incredulous as to why they would bother spending time speaking to me. One woman replied, laughing: 'We can sit here and fight with each other all day, we might as well take an hour and talk to her'. Thus, for some participants, taking part in an interview with me seemed to be a way of passing the time as much as an imposition on their daily routine.

4.5.4 Children's voices

While I did not seek to recruit children as participants in the study, sometimes children were present during interviews; a small number of parents also involved their children in their interview directly by asking a child to answer a question for them (the name of the school or subjects studied, for example). In these cases, the

parent had given their own informed consent to participate and were aware that they were involving their child in the interview through their actions. In this way, parental consent for children to be involved in the interview was implicit. However, I was mindful that young children can give informed consent and should be facilitated to do so (BERA, 2011). In cases where this issue arose, children were clearly very happy to have been drawn in by their parents in this way. However, I decided that I would reflect in the reporting that parents had involved their children and concentrate on the parent's perspective rather than use data from children directly.

However, I did feel some ethical regret that I had not designed the study to involve children to some degree to reflect the feelings and opinions of those whose voices are often lost in the debate around school choice and the LFP sector. While the scope of the research did not allow children's voices to be captured on this occasion, a key point of learning from the field work was that this should be built in to future studies of this nature from an ethical standpoint, as well as to build a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of parental choice on children themselves.

4.5.5 Sensitive topics

The topic of the research study is not in and of itself an intrinsically sensitive one; however, I knew that by exploring household dynamics I could touch upon very personal sensitivities, such as issues surrounding discrimination (e.g. by caste, religion, poverty). The approach that I took was to judge the appropriateness of raising any issue on a case-by-case basis and then asking gently probing questions, such as:

- What are the other children who go to X like?
- Do you ever have any problems with the school?
- Have you ever had problems getting admission to any school?

If opportunities then arose for exploring this further then I took them, rather than asking outright whether participants felt that they had faced discrimination because of X reason, or indeed whether they had chosen a school because of avoidance of another group. I felt that being so direct would be intrusive and might result in the participant becoming uncomfortable and refusing to answer further questions. After discussion with NGO contacts, academic experts and my research assistants, who were split as to whether this question would be offensive, I chose not to ask participants their caste directly, but to leave participants to volunteer this information. However, in asking whether participants were aware of the RtE Act 25% reservation, I was able to probe gently whether participants were eligible based on their caste status. Some participants were very open in sharing their caste and brought it up very directly, while others were not as open and may have deliberately avoided this topic. In order not to cause offence, I chose not to 'push' this issue during interviews, but to reflect in the reporting of the findings the need for caution in interpreting data concerning caste and choice-making in the absence of detailed census and school enrolment data. Thus, while I note the relevance of discourses surrounding cleanliness to caste norms in Chapter 7, I acknowledge the limitations of the data in this respect and, furthermore, do not seek to establish a direct link between caste and the choice of any individual school.

Such an approach also applied to very direct questions about household income, where instead of a review of household assets as is typical in a census, I looked for more 'natural' opportunities to explore issues concerning income and affordability in order to distance my approach from that of a survey, a familiar activity for many participants (see p. 136) and one that I feared would 'shut down' rather than open up conversation about educational decision-making. Very often, households offered this type of information without any prompting (for example, in response to a question about what adults in the family did for a living and/or when discussing the costs associated with schooling and tuitions), although this was often expressed in vague terms. For example, in a typical exchange on this topic, one mother told me that their household income could vary from Rs. 3,000 to 8,000 per month, but was also 'sometimes more, sometimes less'. This lack of clarity and the

likelihood of participants either not knowing or choosing not to share their 'true' income level was a further reason that I chose not to focus on household income during interviews, relying instead on household occupation and level of education as relevant indicators of households' broad socio-economic status. Accordingly, I do not seek to link income to school-choice in a very direct way in the interpretation of the findings (e.g. determining that those with an income over a certain amount were more likely to choose a particular school or school type).

In addition, a few other sensitive areas arose during interviews that I had not anticipated. For example, I discovered that a small number of parents I interviewed had some of their children living with them in Delhi and some elsewhere. Whilst parents were open about this, I was worried about being overly intrusive in probing for the reasons as to why this was. In all cases, I looked out for signs of discomfort and asked my research assistant(s) to let me know if they felt that any participant was showing signs of being uncomfortable with any question. On one occasion, I noticed that a father showed signs of being uncomfortable when this topic arose, so I decided to move on to a different line of questioning.

On other occasions participants also shared very personal stories without any prompting. One woman, for example, described the domestic violence she experienced because of arguments with her husband about their children's schooling. Another woman talked at length about her husband's murder as a reason why two of her children had missed several years of school. In all cases when these issues arose, I tried to use my best judgement as to the most appropriate response and was particularly mindful of ensuring that the participant was not distressed. I also made sure that they were happy to reaffirm their consent to be a part of the study after the interview was concluded.

4.6 Researcher positionality

The qualitative researcher's perspective is perhaps a paradoxical one: it is to be acutely tuned in to the experiences and meanings of others [...] and at the same time to be aware of how one's own biases and preconceptions may be influencing what one is trying to understand.

(Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 123)

As has already been outlined in some detail, this research study is predominantly qualitative and is located within a broadly interpretivist paradigm. It is, therefore, important to reflect on the role of the researcher in shaping the research study at the same time as exploring the research topic at hand. This needs to involve an exploration of aspects of my identity and how these shifted in various ways throughout the research process. In doing so, I am mindful of Peake & Trotz's (1999) argument that an acknowledgement of researcher positionality supports 'building of mutual respect and recognition' between researcher and research participants (p. 37) and it was in this spirit that I undertook the field work for this study. However, as Pratt (1992) notes 'establishing the grounds for taking a position and the right to speak – for oneself and certainly about others – is by no means unproblematic' (p. 241). In undertaking research and reporting the results, which involves me 'speaking' about others, power relationships and issues of representation necessarily warrant detailed reflection.

During fieldwork, I drew on England's (1994) advice that the researcher should act as suppliant, by which she means they should seek 'reciprocal relationships based on empathy and mutual respect [...] Supplication involves exposing and exploiting weaknesses regarding dependence on whoever is being researched for information and guidance' (p. 243). I was thus explicit about my lack of knowledge during interviews, such as what schools were in the local area and what they were like. In addition, I was open to answering questions that participants had before and after interviews, in effect 'turning the tables' on the interview process. Aside from questions concerning the research study, parents were often very curious about me and my life in terms of where I was living, how long I had been in India and where my husband was (if it had been established that I was married). Given that I was asking people details of their lives, it seemed only fair to answer any questions that people had and, in some cases, I think that this approach helped to create more of a connection with interviewees.

Researcher identities are sometimes categorised as 'prescribed' and 'ascribed', or 'real' and 'perceived' (Dam & Lunn, 2014). There were several aspects

of my 'real' identity that were immediately obvious to any potential participant as soon as they saw me, such as that I was White, a foreigner, and a woman. Other 'ascribed' aspects of my identity were also as immediate, such as that I worked for an NGO (see section 4.6.1). In general terms, I found that once people understood that I was a student and not with an NGO, this was accepted in a positive way, whether they agreed to participate in the study or not. In some cases, people were explicit about my student identity as being one of the reasons they agreed to talk to me; for example, one woman commented after our interview that she hoped that I passed my course and wished me luck with it.

In addition, after some time spent in the field I realised in conversations with a few women in one basti that they were under the impression that I was younger than I was and, along with my student identity, I wondered whether this had been helpful in contributing to an overall impression of myself as 'harmless'. As already outlined, I emphasised my student identity throughout the research process to avoid confusion about my role. However, the emphasis that I placed on this aspect of my identity may have influenced the responses of participants to my questions about parental aspirations and education. For example, some participants might have felt an expectation to say that they wanted their children to continue to secondary education, or to higher education because I was a university student. Thus, while not all parents answered in this way, I wondered whether my identity might have influenced some responses, particularly concerning girls' education and schooling.

My identity as a woman may also have facilitated my ability to interview mothers within their own homes, including mothers who wore *ghunghat*⁷¹ where social norms may have been different with respect to male visitors. However, by the same token, I was aware that some men in each basti may have felt uncomfortable being interviewed by a woman because of gender norms concerning social positions of authority, such as in the dynamic between interviewee and interviewer. This was one reason why I decided to employ two male research assistants to assist during fieldwork, in addition to one female research assistant (see section 4.8). This allowed

⁷¹ The practice among north Indian Hindu women of veiling the face, usually using a sari or dupatta (Desai & Temsah, 2014).

me to interview some men in their own homes without challenging acceptable norms of behaviour concerning male-female interactions and without compromising my physical safety. However, while I do not know why some prospective participants declined to be interviewed, my gender may be one reason why the gender balance of interviewees was skewed towards women. Other reasons may have included different working patterns, as I visited each basti during the day when women who were not in paid work were more likely to be at home. In addition, women who were in some form of paid work, which was around half of mothers who were interviewed, tended to work either in the home or as domestic helpers in nearby areas, whereas more fathers seemed to work nights, or further from the localities themselves. The gender split in interviewees may also have been down to chance and/or recruitment through snowballing, although the role of mothers in decision-making with respect to their children's education is an issue that I discuss in detail in Chapter 8.

My relative privilege was another aspect of my identity that I have no doubt also shaped perceptions of me in the field. I did not experience any aggression at any time, but a few comments people made did serve to highlight that I was perceived as someone with money (which I was, relatively speaking). When people asked me for money, which happened occasionally when I was walking around each locality, I was polite, but clear that I was not able to give anything, which was accepted.

With respect to other aspects of privilege and social differentiation, several interviewees offered chai or water, and occasionally small snacks, to myself and my research assistants during interviews, which we always accepted. Aside from basic politeness, this was particularly important because of caste based rules concerning ritual purity, which are connected to the sharing of food and drink. Whilst not being a part of the caste system, and indeed an obvious outsider to this, I did not want to reinforce any preconceptions of elitism or superiority. This also applied to how we sat during interviews; I and my research assistants made sure we sat on the same level as participants (i.e. all on the floor or a step, or all on a bench or chairs). However, if a chair was offered only to me, I had to be careful as I did not want to offend through refusal. When this issue did arise, I sometimes said that we had to

be on the same level so that I could hear them properly and use my recorder, which seemed to be accepted without offence based on my impressions of these occasions, as well as the impressions of my research assistants.

In exploring how I was perceived in the field, it is also necessary to acknowledge the debate amongst commentators regarding the 'insider/outsider' distinction surrounding researcher identity. For example, whilst some argue that 'insider' researchers who study a group to whom they belong have an advantage over an 'outsider' researcher in gaining access, others posit that 'outsiders' are more likely to be perceived as neutral and therefore be given information that would not be given to an insider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I see the value of both approaches to research, and would generally concur with the arguments around the opportunities for 'outsiders' to be granted access to information because of perceived neutrality, although I question the extent to which any researcher can truly be an 'insider' given the multiple aspects of identity that are at play in any social exchange. Whilst I was a clear outsider within the bastis and to research participants because of my ethnicity, an Indian researcher would not necessarily have been an insider within this space (I reflect more on this point later in this chapter). I also find Mullings' (1999) critique of the simplistic notion of the fixed nature of identity compelling:

The 'insider/ outsider' binary in reality is a boundary that is not only highly unstable but also one that ignores the dynamism of positionalities in time and through space. No individual can consistently remain an insider and few ever remain complete outsiders.

(p.340)

During the research process, I experienced the movement along the insider-outsider spectrum that Mullings (1999) suggests, as I was not an outsider in all respects during fieldwork. As I have already touched upon, as a woman I was a relative 'insider' when speaking to women and, with my research assistants, was allowed access to speak to women without a male relative present, which may have been problematic for an all-male research team.⁷² In addition, not all participants

⁷² While I did interview one woman with only my female research assistant, Sanjana, we were typically a mixed gender research group.

were unknown to me before the study, as I already had some NGO contacts that I approached for interviews. My pre-existing relationship with one organisation also facilitated access to secondary household survey data, and this organisation supported me in various other ways, such as by giving me desk space in their office and pointing me in the direction of various government policy documents. Indeed, in contrast to work in the bastis, where I looked for points of connection with people to 'soften' my identity as outsider, I played up my outsider status when with NGO staff to assert my independence from their work. Thus, in the different sites across which data was gathered I moved along the insider-outsider spectrum, with different implications following from my positioning at different points along this continuum.

In addition to how I was perceived by others, it is also important to reflect on how my own perceptions and experiences served to shape the research. Haraway (1991) argues that researchers embark upon research with 'maps of consciousness' that are influenced by their own gender, class, national and racialised attributes. By exploring one aspect of my own 'map' in relation to issues and reflections associated with my experiences in the field I want to draw attention to how processes of data collection and analysis were necessarily influenced by aspects of my identity.

During fieldwork, my prior experiences of education, including as a teacher, could not help but shape my views of the various providers across each local education market. This included negative as well as positive impressions. I also realised that my views of providers were being shaped by my interviews with parents, in that I began to think of comments made by parents when I passed certain schools. The lack of access afforded to me by these schools put me in an interesting position, as my sources of information were the same as many residents, who relied on word-of-mouth for much of their information about education providers in the area. While my analysis of this information was informed by different experiences, it was interesting to reflect on information gaps that I had in my 'picture' of local providers and to what extent these gaps were also experienced by parents. In this way, I came to appreciate how powerful this word-of-mouth information network could be in influencing perceptions of individual providers.

Having reflected on my own positionality in the research study, it is important to acknowledge that I did not carry out the study alone. As already explained, research assistants/translators were used throughout my time in the field and they necessarily, as I did, served to shape the data that was collected. Given that the role of research assistants and translators is often neglected (Leck, 2014), it seems especially important to devote attention to this topic.

4.7 Research assistants

Throughout field work, research assistants were used as translators and note takers in the recruitment of participants and during the interview process. There was also a security factor involved, as visiting people's homes alone could have resulted in my safety being compromised.

Research assistants were recruited from universities in Delhi by placing job advertisements on posters outside libraries and the education departments of these institutions. From the range of responses, I interviewed and selected three postgraduate students with backgrounds in social science disciplines with the view that two would accompany me to the field site at any one time and to ensure flexibility in fitting in with their course commitments. One was selected because of his specialism in linguistics and his experience of working as a translator for academic researchers in the recent past, and he (Ravi) ultimately took on the role of lead translator/research assistant. Prior to entering the field, I reviewed the study objectives with all three research assistants, went over the interview schedules in detail and set expectations regarding how the interview process would be managed. At the beginning of each day in the field, we met to go over the day's agenda, and later held detailed debrief sessions. As the study went on, I used my 'second' research assistants less and less, mostly because of difficulties in coordinating schedules and my concern that a three-person team might be intimidating for some participants during interviews.⁷³

⁷³ This is not based on a specific incident, but a growing appreciation during fieldwork.

I was very aware that my research assistants were not neutral participants within the research process, but as much a part of shaping data collection as I was. In particular, in addition to aspects of identity such as gender, I was mindful of how caste dynamics might influence the research process. As Srinivas (1997) notes:

When an Indian anthropologist is studying different caste or other groups in India, he is studying someone who is both the Other and someone with whom he shares a few cultural forms, beliefs, and values. That is, he is studying a self-in-the-Other and not a total Other, for both are members of the same civilisation, which is extraordinarily complex, layered and filled with conflicting tendencies.

(p. 22)

My three research assistants were two men and one woman; all Indian, but with different backgrounds and caste identities. Two of my research assistants were from relatively privileged backgrounds, although they did not ascribe to caste norms. However, given his prominent role in field work, I want to focus on my main research assistant, Ravi, in the following reflections. I have permission from Ravi to do so here and, with a view to reflecting on his role in the research process in further detail, I also recorded an interview with Ravi towards the end of field work, with his informed consent.

Early on in field work, I noticed that Ravi was skilled in building rapport with potential participants very quickly. While some of this could be attributed to his personality, we discussed the idea of multi-layered identities together at several points throughout the research process. Firstly, Ravi's male identity may have created more ease with men in each basti than if I had been alone, or with another woman. However, secondly, unlike the other research assistants, and unlike me, Ravi grew up in a low-income area of North Delhi, which was not dissimilar to the areas that we were researching for the study. Because of his familiarity with a similar area, it is possible that Ravi was better able to negotiate the unspoken codes of the bastis and may have been 'recognised' by residents as at least a partial 'insider'. This recognition was made explicit in two ways during time spent in each basti.

Originally from Bihar, Ravi spoke Bhojpuri, which was also spoken by some residents in all study sites, and perhaps provided a degree of 'connection' that

encouraged people to take part in the project. On three occasions during interviews, interviewees also asked Ravi what caste he was, which he responded to and they replied with the name of their own caste. In two cases, the interviewee was from Bihar and from a lower caste group, as was Ravi, in contrast to my other research assistants.⁷⁴ When discussing these exchanges after the interviews, Ravi said that while he did not ascribe to caste norms, he did not feel uncomfortable with this question within this context and that it was 'normal' if two people realised that they were from a similar place or social background. Thus, it is possible that participants recognised similar identity 'codes' in Ravi and sought to find points of connection between them. In this way, Ravi was not just a translator of language, but a 'cultural broker' (Leck, 2014) who facilitated communication with potential participants at a broader level than a technical understanding of the role of a translator would imply.

This role of 'cultural broker' also applied to the interpretation of observations and encounters during fieldwork. To try to avoid the danger of misrepresentation, and of 'ethnographic dazzle' (McNess, Arthur & Crossley, 2015), I discussed my impressions of field work and interviews with my research assistants in debrief sessions and in an ongoing way during fieldwork. This gave me valuable insights into the socio-cultural contexts of the study sites and a means of cross-checking. For example, as I describe in Chapter 7, the issue of cleanliness arose in interviews with some parents and became a subject of some discussion between myself and Ravi during fieldwork as to the possible social significance of this in relation to caste.

4.8 Language and translation

While I had lessons in Hindi both before arrival in the field and while in India, my Hindi was (and is) not at a sufficient level to be able to conduct an in-depth interview or to translate written texts. Thus, it was always known from the inception of the study that translators would have to be employed to support data collection efforts.

⁷⁴ Another participant who asked Ravi his caste was from a higher caste group. Ravi gave me explicit permission to refer to these encounters in this chapter.

At a general level, some translations are clearly of better quality than others in capturing what has been expressed in a different language. However, both during data collection and in processes of data analysis, I was mindful of Temple & Edwards' (2006) reflections on the impossibility of a literal translation between languages, in that word for word translation often destroys or fails to capture the essence of what is being said:

If there is no one meaning to be gleaned from experiences of the social world, then there can be no one translation and it may be necessary to convey meaning using words that were not spoken by research participants.

(p. 40)

In addition to seeking competent and experienced translators, opportunities for cross-checking and for multiple translation were taken at every stage. All interviews were supported by at least one research assistant who acted as the translator and where possible by a further research assistant who acted as note taker. Most interviews were conducted in Hindi, with one partially in Bhojpuri and one interview with a father in Location A in a mixture of English and Hindi.⁷⁵ A few interviews with school-based staff and some NGO participants were conducted entirely in English.

All interviews that were recorded were transcribed into Roman Hindi script by a research assistant or professional transcriber,⁷⁶ and translated by a different translator to provide a cross-check on the translation that had taken place during the interview.⁷⁷ Two translators were recruited to support this process, both postgraduate research students who were fluent in both English and Hindi. As part of the recruitment process, which involved posting job advertisements in the main

⁷⁵ Several other parents 'sprinkled' interviews with English words (e.g. the use of the phrase 'English-medium' and 'private'). Some brief exchanges in Tamil were also captured in interview recordings.

⁷⁶ A professional service was used because of time constraints and research assistant availability; the company that I used for the majority of transcription work was recommended by a contact at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU).

⁷⁷ An exception to this was with respect to the Bhojpuri section in one interview, which my research assistant, Ravi, translated. These were limited to a few lines and the difficulty of recruiting a different translator fluent in both Bhojpuri and English meant that this was deemed to be the best option in view of time and financial constraints.

Delhi universities (the same process that was followed for recruiting research assistants; see section 4.8), prospective translators were given a sample text to translate, with the translation then cross-referenced to check for overall validity and accuracy. As an additional quality assurance mechanism, a further three interviews were chosen at random to be double translated (i.e. sent to two translators). No significant differences with respect to meaning were identified through this process.

In the early stages of fieldwork, I found that some parent participants, as well as school staff, were uncomfortable with having the interview audio recorded, although they remained happy to be interviewed (considerable time was spent assuring that this was the case before, during and after each interview). In other cases, audio recording was impeded because of the physical environment and substantial background noise. In such cases, verbatim notes were taken with the support of research assistants for cross-checking. As my Hindi improved, I was able to pick up on more vocabulary during the interviews and to speed up in my writing, but interviews were still slow-moving and I found that it was difficult to get through my 'full' list of questions in a reasonable time. There was also the danger of participants losing interest because of the slow back and forth over every utterance.

Although I have no way of knowing the reasons why, perhaps as I began to be more 'known' in each locality or as interviews through introductions increased, I found more household participants willing to be audio recorded and this helped enormously as I was less focused on verbatim note taking and more on capturing understanding in the moment and the interview flow. As I got to know the physical layout of each basti, I was also able to suggest areas that I knew were generally quieter if I realised that background noise was going to be a significant issue. Interviews were still slower and much more 'back and forth' than they would have been had we all been speaking the same language, but to some extent this may have been helpful in the research process, as I was very aware of clarifying intended meaning throughout interviews through cross-checking.

Across all interviews, I have been conscious of the danger of misrepresenting the words, views and experiences of participants in the reporting of the findings. In view of guidance from Temple & Edwards (2002), I have thus sought opportunities

to discuss data with research assistants and translators both during and after fieldwork:

To conduct meaningful research with people who speak little or no English, English speaking researchers need to talk to the interpreters and translators they are working with about their perspectives on the issues being discussed.

(p. 39)

In addition, in instances where the meaning of a word or phrase has appeared ambiguous in written translation, I have sought to clarify meaning with translators and, when the meaning remains uncertain, to reflect this in the reporting of the findings.

4.9 Methods of data analysis

Silverman (1993) distinguishes between positivist and interpretative social science by saying that the first is concerned with hypothesis testing, the second with hypothesis generation. The first of these – hypothesis testing – is associated with deductive analysis, whereby researchers ‘set out to test whether data are consistent with prior assumptions, theories, or hypotheses identified or constructed by an investigator’ (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). The second - hypothesis generation - follows an inductive approach to data analysis, most commonly associated with grounded theory whereby ‘the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 12). However, Thomas (2006) notes that, in practice, many evaluative studies use both inductive and deductive analysis. This is true of the current study, as the analytic strategy was driven by the research questions and the research design, which were both influenced by existing theory. However, analysis was not driven by a priori expectations or models, with research objectives ‘provid[ing] a focus or domain of relevance for conducting the analysis, not a set of expectations about specific findings’ (Thomas, 2006, p. 239).

Whilst there are ‘few agreed-on canons for qualitative data analysis, in the sense of shared ground rules for drawing conclusions and verifying their sturdiness’

(Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 16), a common understanding among researchers is that qualitative analysis is an inductive and reflexive process, requiring close engagement with the data to allow patterns, themes, and categories to ‘emerge’ (Patton, 2002) and supporting the development of meaning through a process of progressive focusing (Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009). As Berkowitz (1995) puts it:

Part of what distinguishes qualitative analysis is a loop-like pattern of multiple rounds of revisiting the data as additional questions emerge, new connections are unearthed, and more complex formulations develop along with a deepening understanding of the material. Qualitative analysis is fundamentally an iterative set of processes.
(Chapter 4, p.2)

In operationalising this analytic reflexivity and iterative approach, and in view of the inductive as well as deductive elements of the study, I drew on Srivastava & Hopwood’s (2009) framework for data analysis, which establishes a dialectical relationship between research objectives and inductive readings of the data. This is represented by the diagram below:

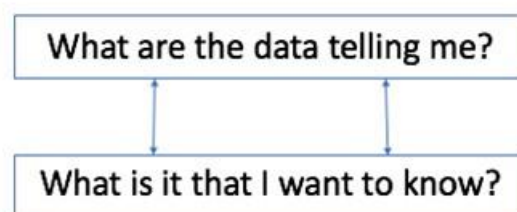


Figure 4.2 Framework for data analysis (adapted from Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009)

For example, I had already identified that school admissions processes were of interest to me in terms of parents’ experiences and negotiations of the choice process (what I wanted to know). Insights from the data (what are the data telling me?) then allowed me to refine my analysis and further readings of the data on this basis (e.g. directing my focus to the bureaucratic tools that are employed in admissions processes). To support the refinement of the analysis at this stage, I produced conceptual memos in the form of ‘working hypotheses’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 122), which were then interrogated through targeted analysis and as more

data was gathered. In this way, guided by the research questions, data analysis involved progressive focusing from general description towards developing and testing explanations or theories (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2005).

The dialectical relationship in Srivastava & Hopwood's (2009) framework also served to illuminate areas that required further corroboration (i.e. what the data was *not* telling me). This complements the guidance of Stake (1995) and others, who have emphasised the need for qualitative researchers to be responsive to the emerging requirements of the study, modifying research questions and even the study design in light of emerging insights into the particular case or subject of study. For example, the decision to interview private tutors and to conduct observations of tuition classes was driven by a realisation early on in data collection that uptake of tuitions was high across the families that had been interviewed.

The framework outlined above also complements Stake's (2006) guidance regarding multiple case studies on paying sufficient attention to single cases as well as commonalities across cases:

For grand strategy, I think it is desirable for the analyst to set up a 'case-quintain dialectic' – a rhetorical, adversarial procedure, wherein attention to the local situations and attention to the program or phenomenon as a whole contend with each other for emphasis.

(p. 46)

Following on from the overall analytic approach, and in relation to each research question, the following questions guided data analysis in this respect:

- What are the differences and similarities between the cases?
- What are the differences and similarities within each case (i.e. between households)?
- How are such differences and similarities related to influences at different scales (e.g. local, state, national)?

Through an attentiveness to comparison within as well as between cases, this comparative approach supported analytic attempts to identify how choices shaped and were themselves shaped by social relations within case sites (see section 4.3.3).

At the same time, the nested approach to the research design allowed an analytic focus on different scales within the wider study to better understand the production of differences and similarities in the nature and enactment of choice in local contexts: for example, how urban planning policies at the state level have served to shape the number and type of providers within each case site, as well as how influences such as religious or regional identity came to bear on choice-making within cases and in specific households.

A comparative approach was also applied to the different types of data that were gathered as part of the study. In particular, written texts (school-based documents and government resources) were analysed according to key areas of interest (such as school admissions) and subsequently related to themes arising from the interview data. For example, parents' descriptions of school admissions processes were cross-referenced to how procedures were described by schools and to relevant government directives.

4.9.1 Analytic procedures

Following Creswell (2002), Thomas (2006) explains that a general inductive approach to data analysis has the following key stages:

1. Preparation of raw data;
2. Close reading of texts;
3. Creation of categories: derived from study aims and 'in vivo';
4. Continued revision and refinement, with the aim of capturing the key aspects of the themes identified in the raw data and identifying the most important themes given the evaluation objectives.

(pp. 241-242)

This is the broad approach to qualitative data analysis that I followed. Following the transcription and translation of interview data, at the first stage of analysis during fieldwork, interview notes and other field notes were coded according to categories relevant to my research questions (e.g. school quality (RQ2), admissions (RQ3), features of private schools (RQ2)) and open codes to 'stay open' to new areas of interest and importance that emerged. Codes were then reviewed and reconfigured

in an ongoing and iterative way as I gathered more data, received and familiarised myself with interview transcripts, and applied codes across the data to check 'best fit' in comparative analyses (see Appendix C for the list of thematic codes for household interview data). Throughout, data have been subject to repeated readings to support growing familiarity (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Coding processes were conducted manually on initial readings (i.e. with highlighters and making notes on texts directly) and later using Microsoft Word (see Appendix E for an extract from a coded parent interview transcript). During this process, code maps were also developed as visual representations of categories, or groups of thematic codes (see Appendix F for an example). This was useful in drawing connections between key themes and in 'thinking through' the analysis in terms of refining categories by highlighting inconsistencies, duplications and relationships between codes.

Once I became confident with the stability of different thematic codes, I moved to a stage of analytic coding, using different concepts as a way of integrating, explaining and analysing data (see Appendix D for the list of analytic codes). In this way, the overall process was one of identifying thematic codes and relating them to analytic codes 'informed by existing knowledge (relevant literature) while also remaining open to new themes that may not yet have been considered' (Griffiths, 2014, p. 46). In addition to coding on transcripts directly, code maps were also annotated using analytic codes to make connections between themes in the integration and interpretation of the findings (Appendix F).

Guided by empirical evidence and key theoretical perspectives as outlined in Chapter 3, data collection and analysis were informed from the outset by an understanding of choice as a socio-cultural practice, drawing on the heuristic device of the choice landscape to conceptualise the operation of choice in contrast to a rational choice framework (Bowe et al., 1994). This review of the existing choice literature and research concerning new social class stratifications in India also led to an analytic perspective of choice as a classificatory practice in the (re)production of social inequalities, and, related to this, meaning-making concerning choice as a mode of consumption in the wider context of parents being constructed as consumer-

citizens within contemporary policy discourses. However, the introduction of more specific theoretical resources was also an ongoing process, responsive to data analysis. For example, it became apparent early in the data collection and analysis that a gender lens was required to make sense of both the role of mothers in choice processes (relevant to RQ3 and RQ4) and how gender ideologies shaped conceptions of suitable schooling options (relevant to RQ1, RQ2 and RQ4). Similarly, the frequency of thematic codes that related to parents' biographies, emotions, and personal experiences, necessitated the deployment of theoretical resources that could help to make sense of the influence of parental identity on the operation of choice as a practice of consumption (RQs1-4). Data were thus subject to multiple readings to uncover the layers of meaning-making with respect to choice and to uncover the dynamic relationship between structure and agency vis a vis processes of social transformation and reproduction. Conceptual 'breakthroughs' and new ways of thinking about the data borne from growing familiarity and discussions with other researchers also meant that codes and theoretical perspectives were revisited in an ongoing way throughout the study. This is in line with Hammersley & Atkinson's (2005) assertion that the analysis of data is not a distinct stage, but permeates the entire process of research, including the process of writing (p. 205).

In the process of data analysis, I have thus drawn on a range of theoretical resources to support an in-depth examination of different aspects of parental choice and, in view of the research questions, to illuminate how choice relates to broader processes of social change and the (re)production of social inequalities. In doing so, I have sought both to think contextually (Clarke, 2013) and to reflect the complexities of choice-making within the study settings in order to capture what Ball (2006) has termed the 'mobile, complex, ad hoc, messy and fleeting qualities of lived experience' (p. 56) that resists causal explanation or the application of a unidimensional theoretical approach. Thus, in the reporting of the study findings, I also seek to draw attention to contradictions, ambiguities and divergences from wider patterns or theoretical explanations.

4.10 Conclusion

This study adopts a collective case study design, comprising three case sites nested within a single, larger urban setting. This approach allows for a flexible use of methods for data collection, for the focus of the study – household decision-making – to be contextualised within local education markets, and for comparisons to be drawn within and between cases in the investigation of choice as a socio-cultural practice. Guided by the research questions, which arose from the review of the literature and key theoretical perspectives on ‘choice’, the study adopts a primarily qualitative and inductive approach to data collection and analysis. In view of the study’s research aims and questions, interviews with parents form the core of the data set. The study also draws upon interviews with education professionals (teachers, private tutors and NGO workers) across the study sites, secondary household survey data, observational field data, publicly available school survey data and written texts to support a detailed, contextual analysis of household decision-making. The next chapter details the main theoretical resources employed in the data analysis presented in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 5

THEORETICAL RESOURCES

5.1 Introduction and overview

This chapter outlines the key theoretical resources that were drawn on in the data analysis. This includes: Bourdieu's theory of practice (section 5.2); resources that help to illuminate the relationship between identity and consumption (section 5.3); and, resources that support an analysis of the role of gender within choice-processes (section 5.4). These theoretical resources were identified both during the inductive approach to data analysis (see section 4.9) and in view of the existing research literature outlined in Chapter 3, which draws attention to the relevance of class, gender and other aspects of social identity to choice processes and outcomes, and indicates the need for a more nuanced theoretical framework for interpreting educational choice-making than rational choice theory is able to provide. As explained in Chapter 4, the understanding of choice as a socio-cultural practice also informed the nested approach to the study design and the methods of data collection, in particular interviews with parents, which were used in order to gather rich and in-depth narrative data that would support an analysis attentive to how parents made meaning of educational possibilities, limitations and eventual outcomes.

As outlined in Chapter 3, the metaphor of the 'landscape of choice' that Bowe et al. (1994) employ provides a flexible tool for thinking about the 'position' of parents within education markets. In this conceptualisation, and in line with the nested approach to the study design described in Chapter 4 (see section 4.3.3), choice is understood as a relational socio-cultural practice, where 'neither reasons nor meanings are free floating' (p. 75) but are 'situated in the multilayered contexts

in which such decisions are made' (ibid.). Using this heuristic device, it becomes possible to consider the relationship between parental choice processes and social inequalities, by 'digging below features of choice-making to a deeper level of structural influences' (ibid., p. 76). This approach also allows for an analysis that shifts across the landscape to view parental decision-making from different perspectives to enable a richer conceptualisation of how parents make choices in ways that are 'potentially non-linear and multi-determinate' (ibid., p. 71). Thus, I seek to examine how parents make meaning with respect to the educational possibilities and constraints they encounter within education markets, and, in contrast to an understanding of choice as operating purely within the narrow confines of economic rationality, to examine how choices may encompass 'look, feel and judgement' (ibid. p.75) as well as rational reflection. In this way, and in view of existing literature in India as well as in other national contexts on mothers and school choice (see section 3.4.4), I also seek to trouble the 'cardboard-cut-out' consumer (Gewirtz et al., 1994, p. 7) of rational choice theory by focusing particular attention on the role of mothers within choice processes.

To examine how the dispositions and resources that parents had access to were differentiated and impacted upon choice processes, the analysis draws upon Bourdieu's theory of practice using the interrelated concepts of field, habitus and capital. This enables an analysis of the 'structure of possibilities' that families faced when making choices for their children's education, including how such possibilities were differentiated according to the capitals to which households had access, and meaning-making within households in view of such constraints to action. In the analysis, this serves to connect choice to the maintenance and reinforcement of social inequalities, in line with the research questions and aims of the study.

With respect to choice preferences and meaning-making, I also draw on insights from the interpretative consumption research literature to examine the relationship between choice preferences and parental identity. This complements the use of Bourdieu's framework by providing resources for examining the more conscious aspects of decision-making, for example, those based on community affiliations, and the ways in which aspects of social identity may be transformed into

consumer choices within education markets, in part through impression management and branding work by schools. This combination of Bourdieusian and interpretative consumption research perspectives also enables a more comprehensive analysis of the coded and more overt signifiers of social difference that underpinned parents' perceptions of different schools and the pupils within them. This attention to social difference is important in view of the focus of the study on the educational opportunities of disadvantaged groups and the implications of 'choice' for social equality.

The third main set of theoretical resources is used to illuminate how gender ideologies shaped how parents distinguished between schools. Through inductive analysis of interview data in Chapter 8, I will show that mothers played a significant role in shaping the choice preferences of households and, in some cases, in how choice processes were negotiated within and beyond households. The primary theoretical resource I use to examine how societal gender norms were reinforced and, in some cases, challenged through educational choices is Connell's (1987) gender and power framework. However, other perspectives, notably those of Reay (1998) and Collins (1994), are also drawn upon to provide an intersectional understanding of maternal practice in relation to mothers' involvement with children's schooling. In line with the research aims and associated research questions, these theoretical resources will help to elucidate parents' experience and negotiation of choice, and the role of choice in processes of social reproduction and transformation.

5.2 Bourdieu's theory of practice

The data analysis draws on Bourdieu's theory of practice in two main respects: to interpret the processes of and constraints on choice-making within the study settings; and, to illuminate how such micro level practices connect to macro level processes in the maintenance of social inequalities.

Bourdieu developed his theory of practice as a theoretical framework to understand the composition of social class structures, as well as how these

structures are reproduced or transformed through individual action (Reay, 2004). Comprising the concepts of habitus, capital and field, components that should be considered as intrinsically related (Bourdieu 1990a), the framework provides a valuable resource for the analysis of strategic agency, or 'concrete human activity' (Bourdieu 1990b, p. 13).

In seeking to understand human action, Bourdieu (2005) argued that it is necessary to examine the 'social space in which interactions, transactions and events occurred' (p. 148). This social space Bourdieu termed '*le champ*', which, in contrast to the relatively benign English translation of 'field', is used to connote a space where a network of power relationships is played out (Thomson, 2008). Bourdieu (2005) explained the concept of field as follows:

A structured social space, a field of forces, a force field [...] Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field.

(p. 40)

Fields are thus social spaces where the choices and actions of agents are not arbitrary but may be understood as strategic in the sense of maintaining or seeking to subvert the existing network of power relations (Walther, 2014). Agents occupy different positions due to the differential distribution of power based on their access to different forms of capital and knowledge of the unspoken 'rules' (what Bourdieu terms *doxa*) that govern the 'sense of limits' (Deer, 2008, p. 115) of possible action. In this conceptualisation, school choice can be analysed as a social field (Gewirtz et al., 1995), within which parents undertake conscious work to realise choices in practice and direct engagement with schools is underpinned by unspoken rules of behaviour.

In pointing to the strategic work of agents within social fields, Bourdieu (1977) uses the concept of *habitus* to engage methodologically with the debate between structure and agency that has framed sociological explanations of the social world. In seeking to reconcile a structure-agency dichotomy, Bourdieu (1977) explains that while individuals have agency in social fields, their habitus, or a set of embodied

dispositions, 'produces practices in accordance with the schemes engendered by history' (p. 82). Suggestive of habitual, unconscious practice, habitus is thus conceptualised as both a structured and a structuring force in shaping individual agency and practice:

[Habitus] is a socialised body. A structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of that world – a field - which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world.

(Bourdieu, 1998, p. 81)

As it is historically produced, the role of individual histories in shaping habitus is apparent (Reay, Crosier & Clayton, 2009). However, habitus does not determine action, but rather generates a 'sense of one's place' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 471) that is responsive to current circumstance. That is, when the social field and the habitus align:

Social reality exists, so to speak, twice, in things and in minds, in fields and in habitus, outside and inside social agents. And when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a 'fish in water': it does not feel the weight of the water and it takes the world about itself for granted.

(Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 127)

By contrast, when the habitus encounters a social world with which it is not familiar, this may result in feelings of marginalisation, exclusion, ambivalence and uncertainty (Reay, 2005), and in actors excluding themselves from engaging in certain social fields or practices 'unfamiliar to the cultural groupings to which the individual belongs' (Reay, 2004, p. 433). As Bourdieu (1990a) explains:

The most improbable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, that is, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable.

(p. 54)

Thus, habitus is a potentially powerful conceptual tool for understanding how social inequalities may be transformed and reproduced through embodied dispositions

that serve to shape educational possibilities and aspirations (Archer et al., 2012). For parents with little or no experience of schooling, the ‘fish out of water’ effect arising from the mismatch of habitus and field provides a useful perspective for explaining what other researchers have identified as lack of ‘voice’ in parents’ engagement with schools (Srivastava, 2007). As will be seen in Chapter 9, how parents explained the compromises that they made in realising schooling choices in practice, including continuing to access what they perceived as poor-quality schools, was also in some instances suggestive of the ‘virtue of necessity’ that Bourdieu (1990a) describes, with the opportunity for higher quality schooling dismissed as unthinkable. As Reay & Ball (1997) argue concerning some working-class families in England, ‘[the] reluctance [to choose high reputation schools] represents a powerful common-sense logic in which to refuse to choose what is not permitted offers a preferable option to choices which contain the risk of humiliation and rejection’ (p. 91).

The risk of failure is heightened for some actors because of differential access to resources (or forms of *capital*) that enable or constrain the possibilities for action within social fields, thus also informing habitus. According to Bourdieu (1986), there are four types of capital that are unequally distributed across social classes:

- Economic: wealth, money or property ownership;
- Social: networks of relations (membership of a group);
- Symbolic: marks of prestige, or ‘capital-in whatever form-insofar as it is represented, i.e., apprehended symbolically’ (p. 56);
- Cultural, which takes three forms:
 - Embodied: ‘long-lasting dispositions of mind and body’ (p. 243), such as accent;
 - Objectified: cultural goods, such as books and music;
 - Institutionalised: academic qualifications.

Bourdieu (1986) notes that the different forms of capital may be converted into other forms, while ‘economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital’ (p. 252). For example, economic capital is required to purchase objectified forms of capital; academic qualifications (institutionalised cultural capital) may also be converted into economic advantages through access to high-paying jobs. However,

Bourdieu (1986) recognises that social capital can be utilised to access goods and services when economic capital may be insufficient:

There are some goods and services to which economic capital gives immediate access, without secondary costs; others can be obtained only by virtue of a social capital of relationships (or social obligations) which cannot act instantaneously, at the appropriate moment, unless they have been established and maintained for a long time.

(p. 252)

Thus, knowing the 'right' person or people, relationships that must be nurtured over time, can be used in school choice processes to acquire insider information, or to facilitate school entry into the preferred school (Xiaoxin, 2013). Similarly, Bourdieu (1977) argues that other forms of capital may be conserved and deployed strategically to transmit relative advantages to children through education. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, the emphasis on English-medium schooling identified by the current study and previous research in India (for example, Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2009) may thus represent attempts to gain relative social and economic advantages through building a child's cultural capital, which in turn may play a role in maintaining class distinctions and advantages. The relationship between schooling and the family in realising social advantages and in processes of social reproduction is thus significant, and depends upon the forms of capital to which a family has access:

The scholastic yield from educational action depends on the cultural capital previously invested by the family. Moreover, the economic and social yield of the educational qualification depends on the social capital, again inherited, which can be used to back it up.

(Bourdieu, 1986, p. 48)

The cultural competence of parents, or how much and what forms of cultural capital they possess, also influences how they decode key signs and signifiers as consumers within education markets. This follows from Bourdieu's (1984) conception of consumption as a mode of communication:

Consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication, that is, an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (*voir*) is a function of the knowledge (*savoir*), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were, programmes for perception.

(p.2)

As Gewirtz et al. (1995) explain, social class groups 'see' and 'know' schools differently (p. 38), and as other researchers have also asserted, this may result in differing school choice preferences: 'in the field of education, parents possess various forms of capital, and this interacts with their habitus (or disposition) resulting in school preference for a school with particular characteristics' (Walker & Clarke, 2010, p. 242).

In this way, individuals' affective responses and choices within a social field, for example impressions of a school that centre on look and 'feel' (Gewirtz et al., 1995), are related to socially differentiated dispositions, or tastes, that Bourdieu (1984) proposes operate as a means of social classification and distinction centring on the values of the dominant culture: '[taste] is the basis of all that one has - people and things - and all that one is for others, whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others' (p. 56). Responses to signs and signifiers within schools, and associated choice preferences, may thus be understood as a classifying practice. Moreover, as Bourdieu (1984) points out, such practices tend to centre on rejection: 'It is no accident that, when [tastes] have to be justified, they are asserted purely negatively, by the refusal of other tastes' (p. 56). As I explain in Chapter 7, this was found to have some resonance within parent interview data, in which government schools tended to be characterised in stark terms in comparison to English-medium private schools, sometimes regardless of personal experience, as previous research has also identified (Majumdar & Mooij, 2011).

5.3 Identity and consumption

The data analysis also draws upon insights from the interpretative consumption research literature to examine how, in addition to differentiated experiences of choice-making as conceptualised by Bourdieu, choice of school by some parents involved a conscious and deliberative articulation of their identities. This includes the private and more intimate dimensions of identity (relating to conceptions of parenthood and motherhood) as well as the broader socio-cultural aspects of choice-making (relating to social status, regional identity and religion).

In theorising the relationship between consumption and identity, Giddens (1991) explains that everyday lifestyle choices embody individual narratives of self-identity, with consumption practices an inherent part of the ongoing project of identity construction and revision:

Each of the small decisions a person makes every day – what to wear, what to eat, how to conduct himself at work, who to meet with later in the evening – contribute to such routines. All such choices (as well as larger and more consequential ones) are decisions not only about how to act but who to be.

(p. 80)

Accordingly, the choice of material or cultural consumption objects may be understood as closely intertwined with individuals' own conceptions of their lives and the images that they may wish to project: 'objects are consumed not only for what they do but also for what they communicate to oneself and one's surroundings' (Therkelsen & Gram, 2008, p. 270). Consumption may thus entail the conscious, public demonstration of wealth, prestige and power, which Veblen (2009/1899) conceptualises as 'conspicuous consumption', as well as other practices that lend material value to intra and inter group expressions of belonging or disassociation. The concept of 'brand community', coined by Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) and designating the community formed on the basis of attachment to a particular product or brand, is useful in drawing a connection between the choice of a particular product and individual identity, culture and social relationships: 'Consuming a specific brand and associated brand image allows consumers to create,

transform, and express their self-identity' (Ekinci, Sirakaya-Turk & Preciado, 2011, p. 711). Further, 'brand community' is suggestive of the symbolic boundaries and solidarities that certain consumer choices may convey. As Douglas & Isherwood (1979) point out: 'goods are neutral, their uses are social; they can be used as fences or bridges' (p. 12).

In addition, the sociological consumption research literature is useful in illuminating the intersections between emotion and identity construction within market settings. Malone (2012), for example, identifies pride as influencing consumer decision-making concerning ethical tourism, while Jyrinki's (2011) explains how pet-related consumption provides owners with ways to construct their identity through emotional attachment. These examples are very different from school choice-making, but they are useful in illustrating some of the emotions entangled with consumption practices and processes of identity construction. Given that schooling choices are an important household decision, attention to the role of emotions within such choice processes is especially appropriate.

The conceptualisation of consumption objects as carrying with them social significance in terms of the ways that they may be used by consumers draws attention to how consumers may choose based on affiliation with 'people like us' or indeed choosing to avoid 'people *not* like us'. This connects to what Alexander (2013) describes as 'we-ness', or social solidarity between groups:

[Solidarity] is about the sense of connection, a matter of feeling and meaning [...] The affective and moral meaning of 'us' – what might be called 'we-ness' – is a fundamentally structuring social force. The other side of we-ness, equally potent, is difference: who are they, and why are they here?

(p. 536)

Drawing on these insights, Lund (2015) uses the concept of 'we-ness' to examine symbolic boundaries and group solidarities with respect to students' academic pathways and schooling decisions in Sweden. The other side of we-ness, difference, is also illuminated in the attentiveness among parent choosers to the social composition of school spaces based on class (Ball, 2003; West & Noden, 2003; Reay et al., 2011; Kosunen et al., 2015) and race (Saporito & Lareau, 1999). In the Indian

context, as outlined in Chapter 3, investigation of the productions of middle-classness has also focused on the consumption of English-medium, private schooling as a key class delineator (Fernandes, 2006; Lukose, 2010; Scrase & Ganguly-Scrase, 2011) and in this way as a form of conspicuous consumption (Sancho, 2015), perspectives which this study aims to build on through a focus on such cultural productions amongst lower income households.

In summary, choice-making is emotionally laden, with consumer practices carrying social meanings that are both inward and outward facing (Ekinci et al., 2011). Given that goods may represent both connections with and separation from other consumers within the social milieu, it is necessary to situate an analysis of consumption within the relevant socio-cultural contexts to understand the social meanings that acts of consumption may carry. How schools undertake impression management work (Ball, 2000) to align to certain brand communities or to establish specialisation within markets also warrants attention within this kind of analysis.

In drawing on the theoretical resources outlined in this section, it is important to address the divergence between understandings of consumption that conceptualise choice as a conscious and reflexive process, and Bourdieu's conceptualisation of habitus as orienting actors to goals and strategies without conscious reflection. Significantly, both understandings of choice – the conscious and the unconscious – hypothesize a dynamic relationship between structure and agency in placing practice at the centre of social reality (see Giddens, 1984; Bourdieu, 1986). Choice in both conceptions is thus influenced by a range of social factors, with the repetition of choices (re)producing social structures. As Giddens put it, 'Society only has form, and that form only has effects on people, in so far as structure is produced and reproduced in what people do' (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p. 77). Although Giddens' (1991) conceptualisation of the self as a reflexive project (p. 32) contrasts with the idea of habitus as a 'conductorless orchestration' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 81), Bourdieu does acknowledge that conscious reflection remains a possibility:

It is, of course, ***never ruled out that the responses of the habitus may be accompanied by a strategic calculation*** tending to perform in a conscious mode the operation that the habitus performs quite differently.

[my emphasis] (Bourdieu, 1990a, p.53)

Thus, I suggest that drawing on the wider interpretivist consumption literature to illuminate meaning-making concerning educational choices is not inconsistent with an analysis that is also attentive to the unconscious aspects of manifested preferences and perceived differences between schools. In combining sociological theories of consumption with Bourdieu's theory of practice, I take the position that decision-making may contain both conscious and more unconscious elements, and that such understandings are not ontologically incompatible.

5.4 Gender and power

Interviews with parents indicated at an early stage that gender played a role in school choice processes in two key respects: how parents distinguished between schools according to the gender of their children; and, at the household level, the role of mothers in choice processes. This called for the application of a 'gender lens' within the analysis to better understand the ways in which choice processes were a factor in the maintenance of gender inequalities and, in some cases, in the negotiation of maternal identity via choice.

While there is not a consensus within feminist scholarship concerning how social practices construct gender, there is a common recognition that gender inequality is deeply ingrained in social structures and institutions: 'when we speak about gender we also speak about hierarchy, power and inequality, not simply difference' (Kimmel, 2000, p. 1). Supported by sociological empirical research, feminist movements in the 20th and 21st centuries have thus drawn attention to how social structures, including the labour market, are infused with gender inequalities: 'the gendered division of labour [...] forecloses a whole range of job options to women: it limits or constrains [their] economic and other social practices in significant ways' (Maharaj, 1995, p. 52). Similarly, the findings from the current

study indicate that the sexual division of labour, and how this interacts with class, caste, marriage practices and economic imperatives, was relevant to how parents distinguished between schools, and to the role of mothers in the negotiation and realisation of choice preferences, as will be discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 respectively.

The systematic framework for the social analysis of gender that Connell (1987) puts forward identifies three structural aspects that interact to form the 'gender order', or the institutionalised gender relations within society: labour, power and cathexis. In a subsequent revision of this framework, Connell (2009) also added a fourth dimension ('culture'). These four realms may be summarised as follows:

- Labour: the division of work within the paid labour market and the domestic setting;
- Power: social relations of authority, both within the home and at the level of state institutions;
- Cathexis: personal and/or sexual relationships, including marriage, sexuality and child-rearing;
- Culture: symbolic expressions or cultural representations of gender, such as in films and media advertisements.

(Connell, 1987; 2009)

This framework provides what Connell (2009) calls 'tools for thinking' (p. 85) to examine gender relations within society. Crucially, each realm should be considered as overlapping rather than as independent: 'in a real-life context, the different dimensions of gender constantly interweave, and condition each other' (ibid.). For example, mother/child relationships (cathexis) are connected to divisions of labour within the home and to cultural depictions of motherhood. The framework also supports a cross-situational consideration of gender relations. Thus, the gendered division of labour operates as a mechanism of social constraint through institutions such as schools that offer differential training along gendered lines and shape women's wider social experiences beyond the world of work.

Connell (2009) also notes that gender relations are always contextual and 'always interact with other dynamics in social life' (p. 87). This is supported by empirical work in India that has identified the influence of caste and gendered norms

of conduct on girls' schooling. For example, in an ethnographic study of a village in rural Assam, Goswami (2015) suggests that gender ideologies and caste intersect to shape educational choices for girls among working class families. Kelly & Bhabha (2014) also note in their analysis of girls' access to secondary schooling in rural Gujarat that gender, class and caste asymmetries restrict girls' schooling options in significant ways:

Girls are expected to conform to strict notions of femininity that involve sole responsibility for an extensive roster of household chores, unquestioning acquiescence to parental will and repressed sexuality in preparation for similar roles as dutiful wife in the marital home.
(p. 748)

Thus, while Connell (1987; 2009) does not address the issue of caste specifically, I propose that the gender and power framework outlined above enables an analysis of the broader social environment in which girls' schooling choices are embedded, through an attentiveness to the more intimate aspects of the gender order (cathexis) as well as to more macro level inequalities in the paid labour market.

Connell (1987) also argues that gender relations and associated hierarchies are not fixed in nature but subject to challenge, giving space to the examination of the micro processes of resistance:

We must distinguish the global or macro-relationship of power in which women are subordinated to men in the society as a whole, from the local or micro-situation in particular households, particular workplaces, particular settings. It is possible for the local pattern to depart from the global pattern, even to contradict it.
(p. 111)

Thus, for Connell, poststructuralist accounts of power do not give adequate attention to processes of positive social change. For example, Connell (1987) argues that the sexual division of labour creates a powerful space for women's solidarity that may work to challenge pervading social norms. Connell (2009) also acknowledges the possibility of resistance and of social change over time: 'change often starts in one sector of society and takes time to seep through to others' (p. 73). Evidence of resistance and solidarities that may form part of a longer-term process of social

change are thus important areas of analysis within the study, particularly in relation to the role of mothers in decision-making processes within households.

5.4.1 Motherwork

The concept of motherhood and understandings of what it means to be a mother are shaped by the various socio-economic, historical and cultural factors in which mothering takes place (Collins, 1994; Arendell, 2000). Moreover, individual circumstances further serve to shape family arrangements and household dynamics: 'families have their own agendas, their own interpretation of cultural norms, and their own histories' (Stack & Burton, 1993, p. 158). Hence whilst some sociologists have argued for a universal understanding of maternal practice evoked from a care response to children's basic needs (see Ruddick, 1994), Collins (1994) and other scholars (for example Kaplan, 1997) have argued that gender, race and class differences are critical to a developed understanding of maternal practice.

This intersectional understanding of mothering is relevant to decisions about children's education, which, as noted in the review of the existing choice literature in Chapter 3, several researchers have identified are often deferred to mothers in various national and social contexts (David et al., 1994; David et al., 1997; Reay, 1998; Stambach & David, 2005; Cooper, 2009; Chapman & Bhopal, 2013). Despite this, there remains an assumption of gender neutrality concerning parental involvement in education throughout much of the academic literature (Reay, 1998). This is despite evidence that has illuminated the role of middle-class mothers in transmitting various advantages to children through their work on their behalf, including in the Indian context as indicated in Chapter 3 (Nambissan, 2010; Vincent & Menon, 2011; Panda, 2015). However, theoretical and empirical work in education focused on mothers from lower income and disadvantaged groups remain significant gaps within the literature in the Indian context.

In this respect, Black feminist scholarship originating in the USA provides insights that may be useful in illuminating and understanding maternal practice within the study settings. In particular, Collins' (1994) conceptualisation of

motherwork, or labour concerned with protecting the interests of children and seeking the power to improve children's lives (p. 56), is an explicit attempt to focus attention on the experiences of women of colour as they negotiate their identity as mothers within socially discriminatory societies. In drawing attention to the significance of power and identity in motherwork, Collins (1994) notes that women of colour in the USA have to reconcile their maternal authority with a social positioning of relative powerlessness. Collins (1994) further argues that motherwork may involve various forms of work across both public and private spaces, and is often supported by other female relatives, challenging the traditional conceptualisation of mother's work centring on only traditional notions of care work conducted within a nuclear family unit. Indeed, the negotiation of the education marketplace and assertion of social agency within this space is one arena where important motherwork may occur, as Collins (1994) suggests:

Schools controlled by the dominant group comprise one important location where this dimension of the struggle for maternal empowerment occurs. In contrast to white, middle class children, whose educational experiences affirm their mothers' middle-class values, culture, and authority, the educational experiences of African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American and Native American children typically denigrate their mothers' perspective.

(pp. 54–55)

Utilising the concept of motherwork in a study of school choice amongst African-American mothers, Cooper (2009) makes explicit the political nature of motherwork by arguing that advocacy work for children's schooling, as in school-choice processes, represents a form of social and political resistance. As I explain in Chapter 8, such accounts resonate with the experiences that some mothers who were interviewed for this study described. For example, mothers who were interviewed occupied a relatively low social position in wider society, but also appeared to take a leading role within households regarding their children's education in ways that at times constituted resistance to traditional gender norms. This includes advocacy work that some mothers did for their children within families, including that which focused on their daughters and was connected explicitly to a

desire for social change regarding traditional gender relations. The influence of caste-based norms of behaviour and the lack of formal education that some mothers described were also found to shape mothers' engagement with their children's education in meaningful ways, further illuminating the intersectional nature of maternal practice, and connecting to the experiences of women of colour in the USA detailed by Collins (1994) and Cooper (2009).

While parents from low socio-economic groups in India have been portrayed as irresponsible within public and education policy discourse (Srivastava 2008), motherwork is a theoretical lens that allows for a focus on the inequities that mothers from such groups experience in the educational marketplace and, in turn, how they may seek agency both for themselves and for their children within such spaces. This notion of transformation is also relevant to Bourdieu's concept of habitus, as previously outlined (section 5.2). Indeed, Arnot & Naveed (2014) identify the notion of a transformative habitus that may involve counter-hegemonic strategies, which the authors incorporate within a model of rural family habitus that also merges intergenerational educational dynamics and those within the rural field. However, despite this attention to resistance and transformation, through its collective nature the concept of family habitus does not necessarily capture strategies of active resistance by individual family members to prevailing social norms and power relations within the domestic sphere. Thus, while utilising the concept of habitus within the analysis, I argue that the concept of motherwork may better elucidate findings regarding maternal agency and choice concerning children's education than a more collective notion of family habitus. The current study thus builds upon existing theory of motherwork by applying it within a very different social context to illuminate mothers' engagement with their children's schooling and household dynamics surrounding choice processes.

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the key theoretical resources that will be used in the chapters that follow to inform the interpretation of the study findings. This centres on three main approaches: Bourdieu's theory of practice, which allows for an analysis that is sensitive to how parents are differently advantaged within education markets and the ways in which unconscious action may be shaped by internalised social structures; interpretative consumption research perspectives, which enable the personal and social significance of more conscious aspects of choice to be illuminated; and, feminist perspectives that provide an analytical framework for describing, interpreting and evaluating the role of the gender order in shaping the possibilities and enactment of choice within households, including how mothers may negotiate agency within such contexts. Utilising these theoretical resources in the following chapters allows for an in-depth analysis of the role of parents as consumers within education markets and draws attention to the limitations of a rational choice framework when seeking to interpret educational decision-making. In doing so, the nature of choice as a relational socio-cultural practice is emphasised, as is the understanding that social reality, including choice preferences and outcomes, is produced by a dialectical relationship between structure and agency. The 'landscape of choice' (Bowe et al., 1994) across study sites is thus rendered as a complex terrain, which further illuminates the shortcomings of rational choice theory in interpreting the values and constraints that underlie parents' decision-making within such contexts.

CHAPTER 6

THE LANDSCAPE OF CHOICE

Introduction to the Case Sites

6.1 Introduction

Having set out the policy and research context of the study, as well as the methodological and theoretical approach, I now move to focus on to the presentation and analysis of the data. This is the first of four empirical chapters that examine choice processes and subsequent choice outcomes. Reflecting the nested approach to the overall research design, and having already outlined how key aspects of the national education policy context are mediated in Delhi in Chapter 2, this chapter situates the three case sites and the broad patterns of educational choices of households within each site within the context of Delhi. Based on these findings, the subsequent empirical chapters then move on to focus on parent quality perceptions and choice preferences (Chapter 7), family dynamics of decision-making within the home (Chapter 8), and how parents make meaning of the constraints to choice preferences they encounter outside the home within education markets (Chapter 9).

In the first part of this chapter, I describe the living conditions and educational provision for households living in low income areas of the city within the wider urban and education policy context of Delhi (sections 6.2 and 6.3). I then focus on the specific study sites (Locations A, B and C; sections 6.4, 6.5 and 6.6, respectively), describing the socio-economic and cultural contexts of each locality, and each local education landscape in terms of school provision. Finally, I compare data from across all three case sites regarding school enrolment patterns among interviewee households (section 6.7) to provide a foundation for the chapters that

follow, which seek to examine the social processes that have produced these particular choice outcomes.

6.2 The city of Delhi: education and the urban poor

The world's second most populous city with a population estimated at around 25 million (UN, 2014), Delhi is one of 28 so-called 'mega-cities' worldwide. Home to a large migrant population originating from less-developed regions of the country (Planning Department, 2013), Delhi continues to expand at a rapid pace; an estimated 75,000 migrants come to Delhi annually (ibid.) and recent estimates suggest that Delhi's population will grow to 36 million people by 2020 (UN, 2014). In line with overall city expansion, the growth of urban poverty within Delhi appears to be increasing (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011), although the overall number of people living in Jhuggi Jhopri Clusters (JJC)⁷⁸ in Delhi is unknown and likely to have been underestimated by official government statistics (Tsujita, 2014).

The pressure of rapid expansion has led the Government of India to state that Delhi is 'to the limits of the "Carrying Capacity"' (Planning Commission, 2009, p. 31) and that 'the city's infrastructure is unable to keep pace with its expanding population' (ibid., p. 32). Writing over a decade ago, Aggarwal & Chugh (2003) reported that the Delhi government had until that time not been able to establish schools at a fast-enough rate to meet growing demand, leading to increased travel time for children and overcrowding in schools. There is little to suggest that this situation has changed in the ensuing years, with a Government of India report identifying overcrowding, teacher shortages and poor infrastructure as significant drivers behind school dropout in the city: 'The schools [in Delhi] are often very crowded. Not only are private schools not enough to enrol all children, the facilities of upper primary are insufficient' (Planning Commission, 2009, p. 42). The poorest areas of the city were also identified as where 'the pressure on school facilities from a rapidly increasing slum population appears most acute' (ibid.). School survey data

⁷⁸See p. 116 for a definition of such settlements. All case sites for the current study were JJs.

echoes this appraisal, indicating that 46% of Delhi's lower primary schools have more than 30 pupils per teacher, the third highest pupil-teacher ratio in India and above the national average of 30% (NUEPA, 2014). Thus, while 87% of slums in Delhi are within 0.5km of a government primary school (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2015), as was found within all case sites, school overcrowding may be one 'push out' factor impacting school retention across the city, with limited school places intensifying pressure on school admissions and the realisation of parents schooling preferences.

At the same time as not establishing schools at a fast-enough rate to meet demand, urban planning programmes concerning low income households have exacerbated school access issues in other ways. The Delhi government has sought to 'rehabilitate' slum areas of the city in different periods since the 1960s, most notoriously during the Emergency (June 1975 - March 1977),⁷⁹ when the destruction of homes in slum areas included a concurrent mass sterilisation drive in exchange for land within new resettlement colonies, such as that bordering Location C (Tarlo 2003; see section 6.5). In more recent history, preparations for Delhi to host the Commonwealth Games in 2010 were criticised by civil rights organisations for associated 'slum clearance drives' that included widespread forced evictions without notice, compensation or appropriate rehousing (Housing and Land Rights Network, 2011; Sudworth, 21 October 2006); Dupont (2008) reports that 217 JJs and associated sub-clusters were demolished between 1990 and 2007, almost a third of JJs in the city. Eviction is thus something that JJ residents tend to live in some anticipation of, although this depends on both land ownership and political affiliations (Milbert, 2008). Such clearance projects have led to the expansion of remaining JJs in other parts of the city, and further strain on what may already be meagre access to social infrastructure, such as schools. Equally, the development of new 'elite' areas in the city has led to an emptying of government schools in those localities (Juneja, 2017). The restructuring of the urban environment and the associated 'cleansing' of public spaces (Fernandes, 2006) is thus reflected in the

⁷⁹ A period during which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of emergency across the country, suspending elections and allowing the Prime Minister to govern by decree.

choice landscape within local education market spaces in terms of the uneven distribution of pupils between institutions across the city and differentiated pressures on school enrolment.

An important aspect of the demand for schooling in the city surrounds the increasing number of private schools, with the percentage of recognised unaided private schools at the elementary stage increasing from 37% in 2007-2008 (Mehendale et al, 2015) to 46% in 2014-2015 (see Table 6.1). At the same time, most recent NSS 2014-2015 data indicate that private enrolment at the lower and upper primary levels is 34% and 29% respectively (Kingdon, 2017). While this is considerable, it is relatively low considering the proportion of unaided private schools in the city. While this might indicate a high concentration of children in government schools, the number of unrecognised unaided private schools operating in the city is likely to be greater than is captured by official data. As summarised in Chapter 3 (section 3.3.3), the extent of private school access amongst lower income households is contested but does appear to be both limited, and sensitive to socio-cultural and economic factors such as income, caste, religion and parental levels of education.

Table 6.1 Number and proportion of elementary schools in Delhi

School type					
Government			Private		All
Department of Education	Central	Local body ⁸⁰	Aided	Unaided (recognised)	
999 (17%)	43 (1%)	1,792 (31%)	258 (5%)	2,641 (46%)	5,733
2,834 (49%)			2,899 (51%)		

Source: DISE data (2014-2015)

The 2011 Census identified that the literacy rate for adults over the age of 15

⁸⁰ Local authorities, comprising the various Municipal Corporations of Delhi (MCDs).

in Delhi slums was 66% compared to a Delhi average of 86%. Thus, the educational level of JJC residents is likely to be relatively limited compared to residents in higher income areas of the city. However, access to basic infrastructure and amenities is known to vary amongst slums, and amongst the households found within them. Indeed, households living in JJs should not be understood as universally deprived and, as noted in Chapters 3 and 4, empirical studies in Delhi have reported both modest levels of private school enrolment amongst residents and varying levels of household income (Tsujita, 2014; Bag et al., 2016). However, while accurate government statistics on the population of slums are difficult to obtain (Dupont, 2008; Heller, Mukhopadhyay, Banda & Sheikh, 2015), the proportion of households from marginalised groups, such as low caste groups and religious minorities, tends to be higher in slum areas (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011; Bag et al., 2016).

Existing data thus indicate various structural constraints that are likely to shape school access and parental choice in significant ways, but also imply possibilities for some individual households to exercise 'choice' in the context of increased privatisation and market-led reforms within the school education system. Indeed, while all case sites should be understood as lower income, as reflected in interviewee occupations and levels of education, communities were not homogenous. There were thus relatively more privileged families within each locality, as well as differences according to parents' level of education, religion, regional background and caste identity. However, before focusing in on the study sites, I first provide a brief outline of the nature of the education market within the city, focusing on key school types and admission policies.

6.3 The Delhi education market

As noted in Chapter 2, there is no single category of government schooling in India, or within Delhi, where there are schools run by central government, DoE Delhi, and the various local Municipal Corporations, as well as differences between institutions based on medium of instruction and co-educational versus single-sex status.⁸¹ This

⁸¹ See Appendix G for a summary of key school types in Delhi.

is not only a complex policy making landscape, but represents a diversification of differentiated provision within the government sector (see section 2.3), in line with the promotion of choice and a consumer mode of parental engagement with schools in government policy discourses. Furthermore, while the government sector could be conceptualised as a 'quasi-market' (Le Grand, 1991), given that government school funding is largely supply side (Dongre et al, 2014), there are both economic and personal-professional consequences for government school staff that are tied to overall enrolment. For example, the number of teachers appointed to a school, and funding for specific schemes such as Midday Meal, school uniforms, and cash transfers for SC/ST and Muslim students, are calculated per capita (Kingdon & Muzammil, 2015).

With respect to school admission policies, non-selective government schools (i.e. excluding Kendriya Vidyalayas (KVs) and Rajkiya Pratibha Vikas Vidyalayas (RPVVs); see p. 47) are required to accept any child who applies at any time during the school year, regardless of locality (Juneja, 2017).⁸² Parents are thus free to express a choice of any government school, although this may be constrained in practice. For example, due to high demand for school places, an annual school-level lottery system has also been introduced for Sarvodaya Vidyalayas (SV) (see p. 47). Admission tests and interviews with either parents or students are prohibited at all stages at all government schools, aside from the RPVV schools, which are academically selective through an admission test. For all government schools, a Transfer Certificate (TC) is required for admission beyond Class I, as are a birth certificate and proof of residence, although affidavits may be accepted in lieu in acknowledgment that such documentation may be limited amongst JJC dwellers (DoE Delhi, 6 July 2000).

Private schools, which may be classified as either unaided or aided, are those managed by a private entity but partially funded by government. However, as in many other respects, aided and unaided private schools differ in terms of fees and admissions policies. In particular, economic incentives for admission to private aided

⁸² In other words, schools do not have catchment areas, as exists in other countries such as England.

school, which do not charge tuition fees up to Class VIII (Kingdon, 2017), are largely the same as in the government sector at the elementary level. However, unlike government schools, private aided schools can apply admission criteria in accordance with their minority status, if applicable, such as religious identity. Academic admission tests are also permissible in private-aided schools after Class I if a prospective student has either not attended any school prior to admission or is transferring from an unrecognised school (*Delhi School Education Rules, 1973*).

In contrast to government and private aided schools, the private unaided school sector may be understood as constituting a truly ‘free market’ (Srivastava, 2005), given demand-led funding via fees and the absence of effective ‘top down’ regulation by the state, as exemplified by the apparent scale of the unrecognised sector and associated corruption in the allocation of legal recognition (Tooley & Dixon, 2003; Dixon, 2004; Kingdon, 2007). In terms of nuanced differences between institutions, private unaided schools may, as with private aided schools, hold minority status according to religious or linguistic affiliations. Schools may also be categorised according to medium of instruction and recognition status (i.e. recognised or unrecognised; see p. 45). However, within what is a highly heterogeneous sector, I concur with Srivastava (2005) and others in arguing that a key category that may be used to distinguish between private schools is with respect to fees.

To do so, I apply a scale that moves from lower to higher fee levels (Table 6.2). This tool is a blunt instrument compared to the range of fee levels that were identified during field work, but captures what was found to be a wide fee spectrum within the contexts of the study. As other studies of schooling in India have described (for example, Majumdar & Mooij, 2011), this spectrum should also be understood as reflected in a spectrum of school facilities, from lower fee institutions found in converted rather than designated school spaces (for example, comprising a few rooms in a residential block, or above a row of shops) to higher fee institutions with substantial grounds and facilities traditionally associated with elite forms of private schooling.

Table 6.2 Unaided private school fee scale

Classification	Monthly fee (Rs.)
Lower	Up to 799
Mid	800 – 2,000
Higher	2,001+

I base this fee scale partly on the work of Ohara (2013), who categorises mid fee schools as those charging between Rs. 800 and Rs. 2,000. This is also in line with data from the most recent National Sample Survey (NSS) in 2014, which indicate that average private school fees in urban Delhi are Rs. 1,800 (Kingdon, 2017); conceptualising higher fee schools at those charging more than Rs. 2,001 thus places them firmly above the city average. However, unlike Ohara (2013), who defines low fee private (LFP) schools as those charging Rs. 300 per month in fees, I expand this category to close the fee ‘gap’ and to reflect possible increases in costs in the years since Ohara’s (2013) study.

It is important to note that, in accordance with the research questions, my aim in this research study was not to determine the relative affordability of schools to families using statistical modelling, but instead to understand how parents themselves discussed affordability, how this varied between households and how this factored into their schooling decisions. In addition, fees do not include other costs associated with schooling, some of which may be unofficial such as ‘donations’ at the time of admission, an issue I return to in Chapter 9. Thus, instead of attempting to define an absolute ‘low fee’ figure, I suggest that ‘lower fee’ may be a more flexible and therefore useful term for categorising schools that draws attention to relational differences between private schools without being overly suggestive of affordability.

In terms of admissions, unaided private schools have much greater flexibility to set their own admission criteria than private aided or government schools. However, the RtE Act specifies that such schools may not, for any child, charge an additional fee for admission (referred to commonly as a ‘donation’ in public discourse) or to ‘subject the child or parents or guardian to any screening’ (GoI, 2009,

section 13(1)), such as an interview. In addition, the Delhi High Court ruled in 2014 (upheld in 2016) that private schools follow the Ganguly Committee's (2008)⁸³ recommendations for entry-level admissions (*Action Committee Unaided Recognised Private Schools v Directorate of Education*, 2016), whereby points are allotted using a 100-point scale (Table 6.3) and a 20% 'management quota' is reserved for places to be allotted at the discretion of school authorities.

Table 6.3 Ganguly Committee recommendations for entry-level unaided private school admissions

Criterion	Maximum Points
Neighbourhood	30
Sibling	15
Parent alumni	5
Child with special needs	5
Socially disadvantaged (SC/ST)	5
Educational qualifications of parents ⁸⁴	10
Girl child	5
School-specific parameters	25

However, the opacity of the 20% management quota, and use of 'educational qualifications of parents', 'school-specific parameters' and 'parent alumni' as admission criteria are likely to preserve existing familial advantages within the admissions process, despite the introduction of a 'socially disadvantaged' criterion and the related prohibition of criteria such as 'mother non-smoking' (see section 3.3.3). It is also important to note that unrecognised institutions, likely a substantial number of private schools in the city, still fall outside of all government regulation concerning admissions. Thus, the patchiness of formal regulation by government in

⁸³ The Ganguly Committee was charged with reviewing admission practices and criteria for pre-primary school admissions at private schools in Delhi by the Delhi High Court (*Social Jurist v. Union of India & Others*, 2007).

⁸⁴ Points allotted based on Class XII graduation. Heavily criticised by civil society organisations, the Ganguly Committee (2008) argued that this criterion would encourage parents 'to get educated' (p. 22).

Delhi still produces substantial ‘grey areas’ in private admissions with respect to social equality, as in the wider national policy landscape (see section 2.3.2).

Another important aspect of private school admissions in Delhi is the RtE Act 25% reservation, which is applicable for all unaided, non-minority schools (Mehendale et al., 2015).⁸⁵ At the time of fieldwork, DoE Delhi stipulated that all RtE Act reservation places should be allocated via a school-level lottery amongst eligible applicants, to be held once per year and conducted in the presence of parents and an official from the local district education office.⁸⁶ In the spirit of transparency, schools are required to display the number of free places available on their notice boards and the names of those ultimately admitted under the quota, a practice a small number of parents who were interviewed referred to explicitly, although at least one family expressed skepticism as to the validity of this process (see Chapter 9, p. 280).

Aside from eligibility in terms of income⁸⁷ or belonging to an SC/ST and certain OBC groups,⁸⁸ private school admissions under the RtE Act 25% reservation are on the basis of neighbourhood (*Forum For Promotion of Quality Education For All v. Delhi Development Authority and ORS*, 2017).⁸⁹ In addition to a written admission form, which is available in English and Hindi, proof of address, proof of income and/or proof of belonging to a disadvantaged group, and a birth certificate are all required (DoE Delhi, 29 December 2015), although affidavits may also be accepted. The application process for RtE Act admissions should thus be understood as challenging for eligible parents to apply for from a bureaucratic perspective (Mehendale et al, 2015), an issue I return to in Chapter 9. The RtE Act 25% reservation, however, in theory expands the possibilities of choice for lower income and disadvantaged households within the wider education landscape while at the

⁸⁵ KVs are also mandated to enrol students under the reservation.

⁸⁶ The Delhi government introduced an online portal to manage such admissions from 2016 (DoE Delhi, 29 December 2015)

⁸⁷ see p. 38, footnote 19.

⁸⁸ Children with special educational needs, orphans and transgender children are also eligible under the reservation (DoE Delhi, 29 December 2015).

⁸⁹ Priority is given for students residing within 1km, 3km and finally 6km of a given school.

same time emphasising the significance of the local through the neighbourhood criterion.

Having outlined key aspects of the broader context concerning education and the urban poor in Delhi, as well as the education market across the wider city, I now turn to descriptive accounts of each case site and their respective local education markets.

6.4 Location A

This locality borders a high-income area in Delhi, although the basti is separated from this elite neighbourhood by main roads. The basti can be broadly divided into two sections, hereafter referred to as Part I and Part II. Part I is an older, larger cluster with a high proportion of *pucca* dwellings,⁹⁰ and runs parallel to a main road. Well-connected in terms of access to water taps, toilet facilities and electricity, open drainage remained an issue in the relatively thin walkways between dwellings; although mostly paved, in some places these were in disrepair and sewage occasionally overflowed. Given the paucity of space, some households had added second or third levels to either rent out or to accommodate their extended families. These were connected to lower levels via ladders, although construction did seem relatively stable (see Image 6.1). Part I was also home to two small shops selling food and petty household items, one of which was also somewhat of a meeting place in the basti.

Part II runs along a main driveway between a group of government housing blocks and a large open drain. With walls of plastic, wood and metal sheeting, the *kutcha jhuggis*⁹¹ in this section stood in contrast to the largely brick built, *pucca* dwellings found in Part I. In Part II, *jhuggis* were arranged in a haphazard manner, without clear walkways between them. In the areas closest to the drain, there were large accumulations of rubbish, in contrast to the relatively clear walkways and

⁹⁰ Basti dwellings (*jhuggis*) are categorised as: *pucca* (solid in structure), *semi-pucca* (semi-permanent, with a roof or wall in a permanent material) or *kutcha* (built from temporary materials, such as plastic tarpaulin) (Tsujita, 2014).

⁹¹ See previous footnote.

common areas in Part I. During the period of fieldwork several households in Part II were destroyed by fire and large tents were constructed to accommodate families. Within a few weeks, this destruction was largely unidentifiable, and it appeared that almost all homes had been completely rebuilt, some using pucca and semi-pucca materials.



Image 6.1 A walkway in Location A, Part I

DUSIB data indicate that around 850 families were resident across Parts I and II at the time of fieldwork; although this was difficult to verify, this seems plausible given the size of the site and estimates from residents that hovered at around 1,000 households. Residents reported that a community had existed there since the 1980s but had grown substantially in the previous five years with families moving from JICs in other parts of Delhi. An NGO respondent noted that demolitions at nearby JICs had resulted in the growth of Part II in recent years, likely part of slum clearance drives associated with the 2010 Commonwealth Games (see p. 177); interviews with parents also suggested that Part II was home to more recent migrants to the area (six household interviewees had moved to the locality in the last five years, although only three of these were Part II residents). Of household interviewees, the three families identified as having all or some of their children out of school were all residents of Part II. Thus, the basti was relatively stable, but recent growth and the identifiable difference in living conditions between Parts I and II echo the findings of

Bag et al. (2016), who suggest that more recent migrants to JJs are less economically stable than earlier migrants, which may also impact school access among such groups.

The average rent per month for a dwelling in a JJ in South Delhi in 2011 was reported to be Rs. 938, higher than average rents in JJs across the wider city (Centre for Global Development Research, 2011). While this does not necessarily reflect higher spending power, it was anticipated that at least some Location A residents (as in Location B) would be higher earners than residents of JJs in other districts. Indeed, while occupations among interviewee families included vegetable sellers, petty shop owners and construction labourers, some fathers were reported as working in semi-skilled roles, for example, as cab drivers and security guards. One father was also reported as a police officer, a salaried and relatively higher status occupation within the contexts of the basti. Of the 20 households interviewed as part of the study, half of all mothers were also in some form of paid employment, most as housemaids in nearby, higher income areas.

In line with the findings of Bag et al. (2016) who found relatively low levels of education among adults in JJs in Delhi, and as indicated by secondary household survey data, most mothers across interviewee households did not have any experience of formal schooling. While data is missing for some households, in general terms fathers seemed to be more likely to have attended school and progressed to a higher educational stage. However, it is also important to note that years of schooling should not imply an assumption of the acquisition of particular competencies, such as literacy.

Table 6.4 Parent levels of education in interviewee households, Location A

Level of education	Mothers	Fathers
No formal schooling	16	6
Elementary level	3	5
Upper secondary	1	3
Higher education	0	1
<i>Unknown</i> ⁹²	0	5

Source: household interview data

In terms of religious affiliation, the basti is home to Sikh, Muslim and Hindu households, and contains a Hindu temple and a Gurdwara. Most interviewees were Hindu, but one Muslim and two Sikh families were also interviewed. Some families who were interviewed self-reported as SC, a small number as general caste and two as ST. From secondary household survey data, Punjabi and Sindhi were found to be the most common languages spoken after Hindi.⁹³ The basti was thus relatively mixed in nature, although in terms of regional identity most household interviewees reported having originally migrated from Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan (see Appendix M).

6.4.1 The local education market

The education market within Location A, or more accurately that which surrounded the basti, was found to comprise several government schools in the nearby area. The most popular options amongst the 20 households interviewed were the four government schools closest to the basti: a local MCD school, two DOE schools (both single sex), and a selective government school. Indeed, the demand for these schools was significant, as indicated by interview data and higher than average class sizes

⁹² Includes both missing cases and single parent households.

⁹³ Other languages identified were Oriya, Bengali, Bhojpuri, Garwali, Rajasthani, Sadri, Maithili, Bihari, Nepali and English.

(see Appendix H), with no government schools having opened in the area since the 1980s.

Echoing the findings of Tsujita (2010), no private schools were identified within the basti itself and no lower fee private schools were identified in the surrounding area. The two higher fee schools in the neighbouring area were not found to be accessed by any households who were interviewed, with most families who were accessing private schooling for their children sending them to schools at some distance from the basti (> 1km) in what could be characterised as more middle-class neighbourhoods. The boundaries of the local education market were thus wider, at least for some families, than in either Location B or Location C, where choices were mostly within the local vicinity, aside from a distinct group of parents in Location B. However, the concept of distance in terms of school choice, and thus suitable schooling options, was also found to be a relative construct, sensitive to income as well as gender norms, as I examine in Chapter 7.

Thus, the landscape of schooling in Location A was different to that in Locations B and C in a few respects, with relatively fewer schools overall, the absence of private aided and lower fee schools, and the presence of a selective government school in Location A. This latter school was extremely popular within the basti, although represented a largely unachievable goal for most families. In addition, the presence of single-sex schools past the lower primary level also proved to feature prominently in parental discourses of suitable schooling options within this local education market, an issue that I examine in Chapter 7. As across the other case sites, the proportion of families reported as accessing private tuitions in Location A was high, with only two households who were interviewed reporting as not accessing such services for any child in the family.

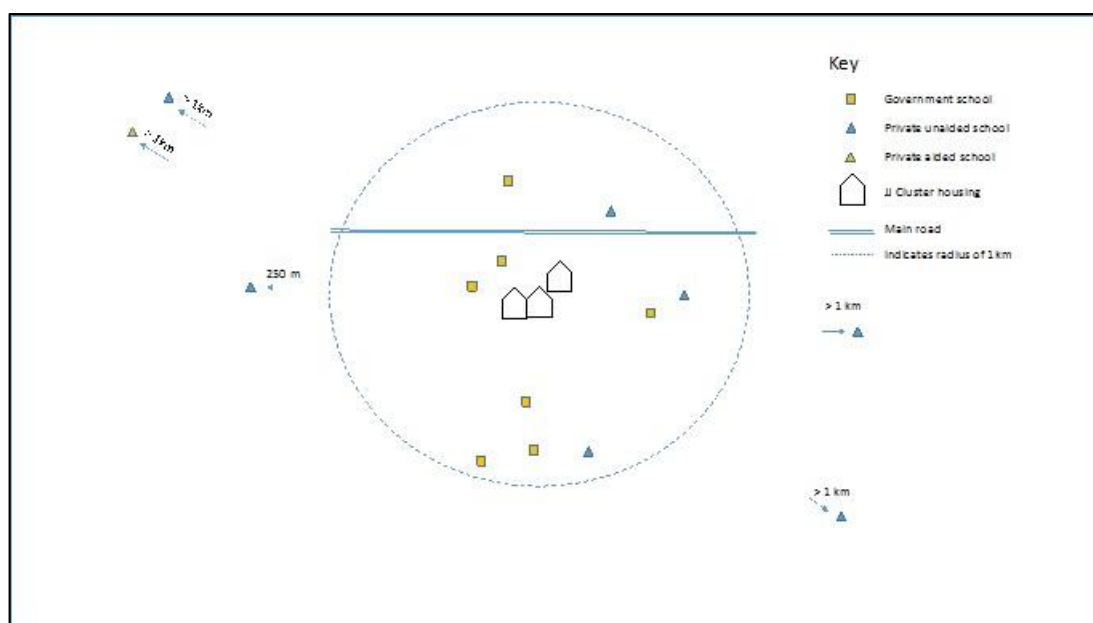


Figure 6.1 Map of schools in Location A relative to the basti⁹⁴

Of the 20 household interviewees in Location A, two families had children who were all out of school, while nine had at least one child attending an unaided private school, all but one outside of the local area. Four of these families had secured fee-free access via a social contact, the RtE Act 25% reservation, or other scholarship scheme. One family was also accessing a private aided school outside of the local area, organised through a social contact. The remaining families were accessing government schooling in the local area for all children in the family. Of these latter households, two were accessing a selective government school through the RtE Act 25% reservation.

6.5 Location B

Found within the space between a block of Type 1 government housing⁹⁵ and a railway line, and bordering a middle-class locality, residents described this basti growing in scale around 30 years ago. Confusion over land rights between the Delhi

⁹⁴ See Appendix H for a summary of the schools within a 1km radius of the basti.

⁹⁵ See footnote 53 (p. 118). Several researchers have also noted the presence of JJs around areas of government housing (Noronha & Srivastava, 2013; Tsujita, 2014; Bag et al., 2016), which may provide greater access to basic facilities such as electricity and sewage disposal.

Government, the Railway Board and a private factory probably contributed to the growth of the basti, as well as to the lack of basic infrastructure, such as toilets and water taps. DUSIB data indicate that around 1,850 households lived in the basti at the time of fieldwork, although residents suggested that this was more likely to be upwards of 3,000 households. During fieldwork, I also observed more dwellings being built at the far edge of the basti, further suggesting that government data are very likely not up to date.

Residents described ongoing disputes in terms of government resettlement plans. Local news reports confirmed that posters announcing the demolition of the site had been posted a few years ago, but no such action had taken place at the time of fieldwork. Despite this, anxieties at the prospect of forced eviction were apparent amongst some residents. For example, one local resident apologised for her home's tin roof saying that they had not invested in a more 'secure' material because 'we don't know how long we will be here'. Having lived in the basti for over 15 years, this sense of the temporality of the family's living situation was striking and may help to explain the school choice processes and preferences of some migrant parents, as I explore in Chapter 7.

The railway line now cuts through one section of the basti, with dwellings closer to the government housing generally larger and in better condition than those that sit along the tracks. By contrast, the part of the basti closest to the railway line was among the most destitute of all the areas visited during fieldwork. Kutcha dwellings cut into the bank at the side of the tracks, where sacking has been laid in an attempt to prevent walkways from becoming waterlogged. Freight trains pass frequently, throwing up clouds of dust and dirt on all sides. Accidents on the line are not infrequent and many families spoke of their concerns about their children 'wandering off' or 'being where they shouldn't'. This concern is not unjustified: during the period of fieldwork, it was reported that two people were killed by a passing train near the basti.

The government paved some of the main walkways in one area of the basti in late 2014, also installing a drainage system and revamping the single toilet block. However, the lack of adequate sanitation was an issue spoken about by many in the

basti and was connected to concerns about the safety of women and girls; men and women's toilets are next to each other, with a common entrance way and little by the way of security or privacy. Reports from NGOs working in the area suggested that open defecation was an ongoing issue, which is unsurprising given the inadequate toilet facilities.



Image 6.2 Entering Location B along the railway line

A consequence of mixed housing and occupations of residents (both government workers and daily wage earners) is considerable variation in the standard of living amongst households. Whilst most of the pucca, government houses are connected to the water and electricity mains, this cannot be said for all the jhuggi dwellings. When the basti was first established, most residents were employed in low ranking government positions or in a nearby factory. With the factory having closed some years before, common occupations currently include cycle and auto rickshaw drivers, cab drivers, housemaids, cooks, fruit and vegetable sellers and daily labourers. While residents and parents asserted that government jobs were hard to come by, some fathers were identified as working in government jobs in semi-skilled, manual roles or as security guards. Such jobs are salaried rather than 'daily wage' and come with civil service employment protections, making them highly desirable within the context of the local area.

In comparison to Location A, a similar proportion of mothers in interviewee households were reported as engaged in paid work, most as housemaids (14 out of 30 households). However, a higher proportion of mothers reported having attended school beyond the elementary level (Table 6.5).

Table 6.5 Parent levels of education in interviewee households, Location B

Level of education	Mothers	Fathers
No formal schooling	15	9
Elementary level	5	8
Upper secondary	8	7
Higher education	0	1
<i>Unknown</i> ⁹⁶	2	5

Source: household interview data

From interviews with parents, the higher levels of education amongst parents in Location B in comparison to Location A may be because several Location B parents had grown up in and attended schools in the local area (this was also true for some Location C parents). They had thus experienced the local education market for themselves, a fact which also came to bear on schooling choices for some with respect to their own children, as I explain in Chapter 7.



Image 6.3 Semi-pucca houses in Location B

⁹⁶ Includes both missing cases and single parent households.

Secondary household survey data indicated a high proportion of families identifying as originally from Tamil Nadu living in the basti, as well as from Uttar Pradesh and Nepal, findings reflected in interview data (see Appendix M). Despite a strong sense of regional identity among residents, 20 of the 30 interview households reported having lived in the area for 20 years or more. However, some parents had clearly maintained strong connections with their extended families, travelling to their 'home state' several times a year.

In broad terms, caste distribution within the basti seemed relatively mixed, in that households from SC and general caste backgrounds were living in proximity. There was found to be a sizeable number of Jat⁹⁷ households in the locality; other household interviewees identified as SC, some as general caste groups, while one mother who was interviewed identified herself as Brahmin. In terms of religious affiliation, the basti was predominantly Hindu, as were all participants who were interviewed.

While parents who were interviewed asserted that there were no tensions between different groups within the basti, further probing with some residents revealed that the Tamil area of the basti, which straddled the railway tracks at the northern end of the community, had a 'bad reputation' for gambling and alcohol abuse. One NGO worker, who lived in Location B, was also explicit in casting the men from the Tamil community as a dangerous force:

Whenever a train passes by from behind the Madrasi⁹⁸ [houses] and stops there for a while to let another train pass, the men loot the trains. They take whatever they can, from coal to lentils to rice, they just take out everything. And the police are scared of them, so they do not act against them [...] I have also heard that there are some notorious people in the colony. If a girl passes by after dark, she is raped and then thrown on the tracks so that she is killed under the passing train.
(Sakshi, NGO worker)

While I did observe men playing cards on the railway lines and there was an alcohol shop in this part of the basti, such dramatic stories of looting, rape and murder are

⁹⁷ An OBC group from North India that is relatively higher status than other SC and OBC groups (Jeffrey et al., 2004).

⁹⁸ A derogatory term for a person from South India.

more akin to stereotyping than eyewitness account. However, the example above serves to illuminate tensions across localities that may impact on children's schooling; for example, two mothers who were sending their children to local private schools mentioned bullying that their child experienced, which they connected to their children's South Indian provenance, an issue that I explore further in relation to choice-making in Chapter 7.

6.5.1 The local education market

The education market in and around Location B was found to be more varied than in Location A in the sense that there was one lower fee private school close to the basti, as well as a range of mid-to-high fee schools in the nearby area. Government schooling options were also varied, with more than one MCD school and more than one DOE school within a 1km radius. According to DISE data, only two government schools have opened in the area in the last 20 years, with most having been established in the 1950s prior to major population growth. In contrast to Locations A and C, two private aided schools were identified in the immediate neighbourhood surrounding the basti; a private aided, Tamil-medium school some distance from the basti was also accessed by a large proportion of households from this community. As in Location A, uptake of private tuition services was very high, with 21 of the 30 households accessing private tuitions for at least one child in the family; those not accessing such services were split between those who expressed that they felt able to tutor their child themselves (4 households), those who said that they could not afford tuitions (4 households), and one mother who felt that her children were too young to attend (1 households).

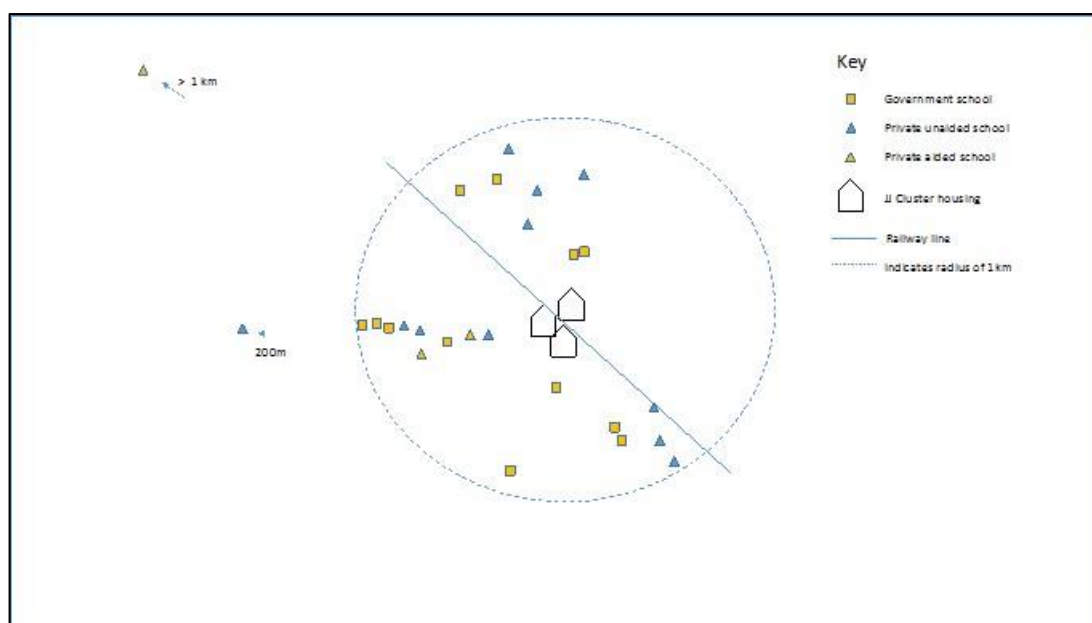


Figure 6.2 Map of schools in Location B relative to the basti⁹⁹

Amongst household interviewees, schooling choices were concentrated in the area to the west of the basti, with very few households accessing the schools to the north, at least in part because of physical access issues. Of the 30 households interviewed for the study, 25 were accessing either unaided or aided private schooling for at least (and sometimes only) one child within the family, a much higher proportion than in Location A and Location C (notwithstanding the relatively small number of households covered in the latter case site). However, some parents described one of the two private aided schools in the local area as a government school, illustrating that such schools are not always associated with private provision.

Of the families accessing fee-paying private schools for children, this was mostly the two unrecognised, unaided private schools in the area (one lower and one mid fee school). One interviewee family were paying to send their child to a nearby higher fee school, with another family accessing this higher fee school for a short period before moving to a nearby private-aided school. Two household also reported accessing two different local higher fee private schools through the RtE Act 25% reservation.

⁹⁹ See Appendix I for a table summary of schools within a 1km radius of the basti.

6.6 Location C

Location C in east Delhi differs from Locations A and B in that while more middle-class areas were still to be found nearby, such spaces were as not as 'elite' as the neighbourhoods bordering Location A or Location B. Bordering a large resettlement colony established in the 1970s, residents of Location A have extended homes vertically to add several stories to existing structures. While it was difficult to judge, some buildings were up to five levels in height; most seemed to be built from pucca materials, although this was somewhat haphazard. Heights between buildings were irregular and dwellings also varied in size and shape. According to DUSIB estimates at the time of fieldwork, there were around 3,000 households in the basti, although, as in Location B, I estimate the number of households to be much greater; the surrounding areas and resettlement colony bordering the basti were also densely populated.

The *galis* (walkways) between buildings were relatively wide close to the main road, but became increasingly narrower, with little natural light managing to get down to street level. Getting lost in the maze of streets would have been easy, and, with my research assistants, I recruited participants from three *galis* close to the main road. Most of the families that I interviewed lived on the ground level, in large part because these were the people I met when I walked through the basti. One did live on a high level of one building, where we also held the interview. This confirmed that most dwellings were semi-pucca in the sense of having brick walls, but that roofs on the higher levels tended to be made from kutcha materials (i.e. tarpaulin).

Occupations among interviewees included various semi-skilled manual and other daily wage work, while one father owned a small shop in the basti. In contrast to Locations A and B, mothers who were in paid employment were engaged in pattern cutting denim fabric, which was an activity that they undertook during interviews. Paid on a 'piece work' basis, the income generated from this type of employment is both low and unstable (Tarlo, 2003). Reported monthly incomes of interviewees and other residents were between Rs. 5,000 and 7,000, although most interviewees simply said that they did not earn much. While a much smaller sample

of interviewees than in Locations A and B, parental levels of education indicate a similar pattern of relatively low levels of formal schooling amongst mothers in comparison to fathers. As in Location B where some parents had attended nearby schools themselves, three fathers reported that they had attended schools in the local area.

Table 6.6 Parent levels of education in interviewee households, Location C

Level of education	Mothers	Fathers
No formal schooling	5	2
Elementary level	0	2
Upper secondary	1	3
Higher education	0	0
<i>Unknown</i> ¹⁰⁰	2	1

Source: household interview data

As has already been outlined, a small number of interviews were conducted with households in Location C primarily because of the relatively high proportion of Muslim families living in this area compared to Locations A and B. Four families that I interviewed in Location C were Muslim and four were Hindu. Of the Hindu participants, one family self-reported as general caste during the interview, the others as SC.

The broader area of Delhi within which the study site is located was the site of violent clashes between Hindu and Muslim groups in the early 1990s. Whilst publicly reported instances of religious based violence in the area seem to be rare and none were observed during fieldwork, the issue of conflict between groups did arise during the process of data collection. In particular, I was ‘advised’ not to speak to the Muslim neighbours of one Hindu family who I interviewed, and similarly so by some Muslim residents with respect to their Hindu neighbours. Comments were along the lines of ‘don’t bother speaking with them, they don’t even educate their children’ or ‘they are not good people’, but were not threatening in the sense that I was not at any time prevented from speaking to anyone. However, religious tensions

¹⁰⁰ Includes both missing cases and single parent households.

were brought up by parents occasionally in interviews in relation to schooling, an issue that I address in Chapter 7.

6.6.1 The local education market

The mapping of schools in Location C was challenging given the lack of specificity of school locations from DISE data. Reports from parents were useful in this respect, as were NGO contacts, and local assembly constituency maps produced by the government. Several government schools were also found to operate in shifts, or to share a school building, which provided an additional layer of complexity when trying to locate what on paper appeared to be separate school premises.

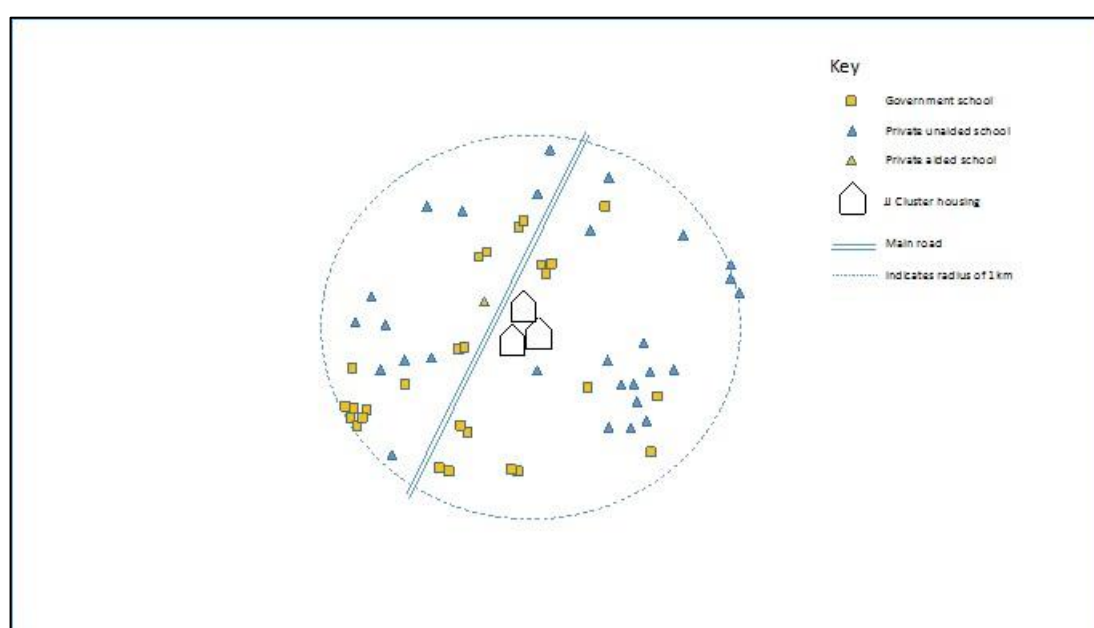


Figure 6.3 Map of schools in Location C relative to the basti¹⁰¹

As can be gleaned from Figure 6.3 and the list of schools in the area (see Appendix J), this area had a relatively high proportion of unaided private schools, including some unrecognised providers, substantially more than in either Location A or Location B. It is also possible that there were more unrecognised private schools than captured in the mapping exercise, given the time and person-power limitations

¹⁰¹ Note that schools that shared a building are represented by a single figure.

of the study; I was only able to identify such schools that were either visible from a main road or walkway, or had been identified by parent interviewees. This may be the consequence of higher demand for schooling in the locality given higher population density in comparison to Locations A and B. However, the relatively high proportion of private schools may also be the result of the higher proportion of Muslim households, whose access to government schooling has been identified as constrained (Gol, 2006; Sarangapani & Winch, 2010), as I examine in Chapter 7.

Six of the eight interviewee households that I interviewed in Location C were accessing unaided private schooling for at least one child. In one case, this was fully funded through an NGO school access programme; no other children in the family were attending a private school. Reported fee levels of the three private schools being accessed by interviewee families were between Rs. 300 and Rs. 1,000, and so were lower to mid fee range schools, as were most of the unaided private schools that I could identify in the locality. In terms of government schooling, interviewees reported accessing a local MCD school and two DOE schools. Two families also reported being turned away from their first choice DOE government school on the basis that it was oversubscribed. Indeed, DISE data suggests that several government schools had very large class sizes (> 30 pupils), an issue not confined to the government sector but indicating that although 8 of the 30 government schools in the area opened in the last 20 years, this has been insufficient to keep pace with demand, as it also appeared in Location A. Unlike Locations A and B, no families reported accessing schools outside of the local area, except for one family where the eldest son was living and attending school in a different state. Reflecting the high uptake in the other case sites, all interviewee households in Location C were accessing private tuition services.

6.7 School enrolment across the case sites

As summarised earlier in this chapter, school mapping data reveal a significant number of schools within the immediate vicinity of each case site, including government, private unaided, and some private aided schools. Among households

that were interviewed, school enrolment at the elementary stage reflects this diversity, as captured in Table 6.7, as well as a small number of out-of-school elementary-age children in Location A.¹⁰²

Table 6.7 Elementary level enrolment across all case sites by school type

School type	Location									Total
	A			B			C			
	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All	Boy	Girl	All	
Government	10	8	18	9	7	16	5	7	12	46
Private Unaided	8	3	11	9	5	14	5	2	7	32
Private Aided	1	0	0	12	10	22	0	0	0	23
Not in school	1	7	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	8
Total	20	18	38	30	22	52	10	9	19	109

Source: household interview data

Across interview households, the proportion of children enrolled in unaided private schools at the elementary stage is 29%, slightly under the all-Delhi average (see Table 2.2, p. 46). However, it is important to stress that my sampling strategy was not random and proportional enrolment patterns cannot be extrapolated to whole communities.

While the size of the sample is modest and tests of statistical significance are not appropriate, data are in line with larger scale studies that have identified differences in private school enrolment according to gender (as outlined in Chapter 3, pp. 90-91), with a slightly lower proportion of girls enrolled in private schools within all case sites compared to boys, notwithstanding the unequal ratio of boys to girls within the data set. Moreover, while income data was not collected, across all case sites parents paying to access mid or higher fee private schools were those with (relatively) higher paying, government or other contractual jobs (see Appendix M), as would be predicted in view of existing research that has identified the significance of income in determining access to unaided private schools as outlined in Chapter 3 (see for example: Härmä, 2008, 2011; Singh & Sarkar, 2012; Woodhead et al., 2013).

¹⁰² Five of the eight out-of-school children of elementary school age were within a single household. Older children in a small number of other households across all case sites were also reported as having left school before the end of elementary schooling.

However, parents with such occupations did not comprise all interviewee households accessing unaided private schools across all case sites. This includes families paying to access lower fee schools, as well as those accessing high and mid fee schools through the RtE Act 25% reservation or other form of fee-free access.¹⁰³ Moreover, some parents with similar, relatively higher-status jobs were not accessing unaided private schools for any or all of their children. Similarly, while children accessing unaided private schooling tended to have at least one parent who had attended secondary level schooling, although not always, not all parents who had attended secondary and above were accessing unaided private schooling for all or any of their children. Thus, while important, parental education and occupation (and by turn income) did not seem to be the only factors shaping school enrolment patterns and the selection of unaided private schooling. The high uptake of private tuitions across all case sites and households also indicates that occupation, parents' education and school type were not in themselves indicators of the likelihood of accessing private tuitions.

A closer look at school enrolment data across households for all children in each family also indicates that enrolment by school type differed *within* families. In particular, while 15 families were accessing only unaided private schooling, 11 families across the data set were found to be accessing both unaided private and other types of schooling for different children within the family (see table 6.8). Thus, school choice does not necessarily represent a singular decision to access either the government or the unaided private sector in these localities, echoing the findings of Srivastava (2007), who identifies a similar phenomenon across her study sample of LFP school choosers.

¹⁰³ Routes to fee-free access were identified as follows: academic scholarship; an NGO fee-free scheme; fees paid for by a social contact; fee-free access organized through a social contact.

Table 6.8 Household school access by school type

School type	Location			Total
	A	B	C	
Private Unaided only	5	8	2	15
Private Unaided plus Government	3	2	4	9
Private Unaided plus Private Aided	0	2	0	2
Government only	9	5	2	16
Government plus Private Aided	1	2	0	3
Private Aided only	0	11	0	11
Not accessing any school	2	0	0	2

Source: household interview data

The proportion of families accessing only government schooling was found to be slightly higher in Location A than in other case sites, likely because of the relatively limited number of other school types in the vicinity compared to Locations B and C. The proportion of families accessing only private aided schooling was also much higher in Location B, again partly due to the mix of schools in that locality, but also due to the role played by regional identity choice-making, as I demonstrate in Chapter 7.

In addition, while the sample size is limited, family size appeared to play a role in whether a household was accessing only private schooling. The ten families across all case sites with only one child who had reached elementary school age were all accessing private or selective government schools, while seven of the twelve families with four or more children were accessing either only government or no schooling at all. Family size is likely to be important in choice-making because of its influence on the household budget and has been identified by other researchers as correlated to private school access using large scale survey data (Woodhead et al., 2013). However, how parents made meaning of budgetary constraints in decision-making processes within the context of the whole household is unclear from enrolment data alone, and is thus an issue I return to in the analysis of parent interview data in Chapter 9.

Finally, again while the sample size is limited, eight households were

interviewed who belonged to a religious minority group;¹⁰⁴ of these, seven were accessing unaided private or selective government schooling for at least one child in the family. In most cases, this appeared to be at least in part connected to eligibility for fee-free access schemes, notably the RTE Act 25% reservation. However, the significance of religious identity to the choice-making of at least some Muslim families is an issue that I address in Chapter 7. Thus, mix of schools, socio-cultural factors, parents education, occupation and family composition all appear to have some relationship to choice outcomes in each locality, as I explore further in the following chapters.

6.8 Conclusion

An examination of the wider educational landscape in Delhi indicates that increased urban migration has not been matched by the infrastructural developments required to ensure the supply of government school places needed to meet the demands of the growing population. Exacerbated by attempts to ‘reform’ poor areas of the city, issues of overcrowding and strained services are likely to be challenges facing parents accessing or attempting to access the government sector. As within India more generally, it is within this wider context of government neglect that the private sector has expanded at a rapid pace. Indeed, official data indicate that the elementary education market in Delhi has a relatively equal ratio of unaided private to government schools and a relatively small but not insignificant number of private aided providers. In line with the national policy landscape outlined in Chapter 2, ‘grey areas’ in unaided private school admissions may also be identified.

Data reveal important variations in terms of the mix of schools within local market settings, including differences in the number of schools available in the vicinity and different options for parents wanting to exit the mainstream government sector: a selective government school in Location A; private-aided providers in Location B; and a much higher proportion of lower fee private schools

¹⁰⁴ Two Sikh households (Location A); five Muslim households (Locations A and C); and one Christian household (Location A).

in Location C. Differing numbers of schools across case sites could be interpreted as related to population density, with the number of schools increasing with the estimated number of households across case sites. However, the type of providers should also be contextualised in relation to the wider neighbourhood in which each case site was nested. For example, Location A was surrounded by a higher income neighbourhood with perhaps less demand for low and mid fee schooling, whilst the relatively higher proportion of Muslim households in Location C may be a factor driving private sector growth within this locality (Sarangapani & Winch, 2010), an issue I return to in Chapter 7. At the same time, while all case sites should be understood as lower income, as reflected in interviewee occupations and levels of education, localities were not homogenous. There were thus some more privileged families within each locality, as well as differences according to parents' level of education, religion, regional background and caste identity.

School enrolment data reflects the different kinds of mix of schools across localities and, when analysed together with family demographic information, suggests that gender, family composition and socio-economic factors influence schooling choices. However, what is not clear from school enrolment data alone is what was driving the selection of individual schools, including the decision to exit the mainstream government sector, and the extent to which these choices could be described as rational choices based on academic quality.

In the following three chapters I draw on the theoretical resources explicated in Chapter 5 to analyse parent interview data in ways that are sensitive to a spatial and relational conception of place, as articulated in Chapter 4. Chapter 7 considers parents' goals in seeking education for their children, focusing on how parents conceptualised school quality and prioritised academic outcomes in their decision-making; Chapter 8 provides further nuance concerning how decisions are made within families, focusing on the role of mothers in choice-processes; and Chapter 9 considers the barriers within education markets that limit the realisation of choice preferences whatever the initial goals and aspirations.

CHAPTER 7

QUALITY PERCEPTIONS AND SCHOOLING CHOICES

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explained that some parents across all three case sites were accessing private forms of schooling. Moreover, parents within each locality were found to be accessing *different* government, private unaided and private aided schools, indicating that at least some if not all parents were making choices between individual providers. In this chapter, I present an analysis of parents' perspectives on school and education quality to examine whether schooling choices and the apparent demand for private schooling are underpinned by concerns about quality issues alone.

Focusing on quality perspectives within the data analysis is important given that proponents of school choice in low income contexts argue that parents accessing low fee private (LFP) schools have made a rational choice to invest in private schooling based on a judgement that the quality of education in such schools is superior to that found in the government sector (Dixon et al., 2013). Moreover, based on assumptions of tacit knowledge, parent consumers are understood as able to judge quality sufficiently to discern between providers (Tooley et al., 2007). However, arguments that parents are consumers who work to make the 'best' choices for their children often fail to consider how parental conceptions of school and educational quality vary depending on several factors, including how socio-cultural influences shape both quality perceptions and the extent to which quality is prioritised in decision-making.

I begin by outlining parents' quality perceptions and define four key types of parent chooser - *disengaged*, *minimally engaged*, *aspirational*, and *community* –

basing these categories on the extent to which parents emphasised quality, however defined, in their narratives of choice-making and sought to act on such quality perceptions and preferences (section 7.2). Identifying the perceived superior quality of private unaided schooling by all parents across all case sites, I explain how ‘English-medium’, and ‘private’ (fee-paying) operate as key proxy quality indicators within education markets while also serving as key signifiers in the articulation of social class distinctions (section 7.3). I then turn to focus on those parents who chose schools based on community affiliations and prioritised these over perceived quality, a practice I interpret as a process of *forging solidarities* with other households along specific identity constructs (section 7.4). Finally, I consider how gender norms also shaped the relative significance afforded to quality in parents’ conceptions of ‘suitable’ schooling options (section 7.5). In doing so, I focus on findings and key analytic themes that cut across the localities, but also identify how in some cases these are inflected differently because of locality specific phenomena, such as the mix of schools in the local area.

7.2 Quality perceptions

Understanding why parents place value on schooling and education is important for a developed understanding of the schooling choices that they make (Winch, in press), including the decision to invest considerable financial resources in private school fees and/or private tuitions. With a very small number of exceptions, as I detail in the next section of this chapter, most parents who were interviewed across all case sites and school types expressed their hopes and expectations for their children’s education, saying that they felt that education was necessary for children to do well in life, as other researchers in India have previously identified (for example Jeffrey et al., 2008). In most cases, this was expressed in direct comparison to parents’ own lives and educational experiences. For example:

[Education] is very important. We know that we want our children to be educated. It is necessary for everything [...] We have to look after a lot of things and without education, we cannot even understand the bus number that we have to board. So, education is very necessary. (Aamrita, mother; Location A, private aided and government schools)

If they [children] don't study, they would remain like us. So that is why education is very important for us; to be successful in life and for a good future.

(Reenu, mother; Location B, private aided school)

Education in the form of learning outcomes was thus important for practical reasons, as Aamrita expresses in the above extract, as well as for higher paid jobs and securing a 'good future'. Therefore, it might be anticipated, as rational choice theory would predict, that quality would factor into schooling decisions in the desire to achieve key educational outcomes.

Parents described various factors within interviews that comprised their understanding of school quality, which included educational processes, inputs and outcomes, with the former two articulated as closely related to the latter (see Table 7.1). In this respect, differences between case sites were not identifiable. However, as I go on to explain, across the case sites there were differences in the level of specificity in parents' accounts of quality. Some parents discussed quality in relatively general terms, expressing a desire for 'good teachers', for example, while others gave more detailed accounts of what they understood by good teaching, such as teachers checking whether children understood what was being taught. There were also variations in the extent to which quality was referred to as informing schooling decisions directly.

Table 7.1 Parent articulations of school quality

Aspects of education	<div> General <div>→</div> More specific </div>		
Input - Facilities	Clean environment	Security measures	Computers, audio-visual equipment, sports facilities
Process – Teaching	‘Good’ teachers	Discipline, teaching activity designed to ensure learning, communication with parents, showing children care	Advanced curriculum topics, English-medium, giving homework
Outcome - Learning	‘Becoming educated’	Literacy and numeracy skills, ¹⁰⁵ good manners	English language skills, computer skills

Overall, the findings regarding aspects of perceived quality reflect other studies in the Indian context that have identified teacher engagement as a key aspect of lower income parents’ articulations of school quality (Singh & Sarkar, 2012; Galab et al., 2013; Morrow & Wilson, 2014; see section 3.4.1). However, accounts of close communication between teachers and parents did not ascribe to a corporatised notion of teacher accountability (see p. 81) but formed part of a more holistic notion of ‘teacher care’ that was evident in parents’ articulations of quality. This reflects one aspect of greater community involvement that some empirical studies have identified as leading to improved school functionality and reduced educational exclusion (Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010).

In accordance with my expectations (see section 3.4.1), but not necessarily reflecting objective measures of school quality (Balarin, 2015), the importance of school facilities was also reflected in interview data, with an emphasis on issues concerning security and cleanliness, as well as proxy indicators that related more directly to specific learning outcomes, such as the presence of computers. The

¹⁰⁵ Note that literacy and numeracy were not specified by name, but denoted descriptively (e.g. good education signifying a child being able to read documents).

importance of English within parent articulations of quality also echoes the observations of other researchers who have noted the demand for English-medium schooling in India (e.g. Tooley et al., 2007; Härmä, 2011; Sancho, 2015).

The use of proxy indicators in the form of educational inputs and processes for educational outcomes are to be expected, given that outcomes are longer term and may be challenging to assess in the absence of assessment data within the study contexts (see section 3.4.1). However, while the relationship between certain proxies is clear (the presence of computers in a school means that the acquisition of computer skills is more likely than when computers are absent, for example), this is not guaranteed. For example, giving homework and advanced curriculum topics as quality proxies reflects the findings of studies of LFP schooling in other national contexts, but, as Balarin (2015) notes, are inadequate for assessing learning in practice. As noted in Chapter 3, English-medium education, while desirable, is also not a quality indicator in and of itself (Sarangapani & Winch, 2010). I focus on the key quality proxies (English and private) later in this chapter and in Chapter 9 I return to the issue of how parents assessed quality with respect to desired learning outcomes. However, first I identify four key categories of parent chooser based on how parents emphasised quality criteria in their accounts of their schooling decisions, in doing so signaling tentative characteristics of these categories that I go on to develop further in later chapters.

7.2.1 Parent choosers: disengaged, minimally engaged, aspirational and community

As previously indicated, most parents across all school types indicated similar conceptions of education and school quality. However, there were identifiable differences in terms of which aspects of quality were emphasised and how such quality preferences factored into schooling decisions. In this section, I identify four categories of parent chooser – disengaged, minimally engaged, aspirational and community – which I apply across case sites to help to interpret school enrolment patterns, as previously outlined in Chapter 6.

Parents who I categorise as *disengaged choosers* were those who were not sending children to school or private tuitions and had no immediate plans to do so, or who, while not opposed to their children attending school, expressed explicit ambivalence in this regard. Within the contexts of the study, only two of the 58 households interviewed fit these criteria: one in Location A and one in Location B (see Appendix M). Given such minimal representation within the data set, I do not focus on this category within the reporting of the study findings. However, one commonality between these households was that they had been through a period of personal upheaval in recent years;¹⁰⁶ notwithstanding that all localities were low income areas, disengaged choosers also emphasised their past and present financial difficulties during interviews.

Parents who I classify as *minimally engaged choosers* had all enrolled children in school, and all expressed what they saw as the importance of their children's education during interviews. The majority were also accessing private tuitions for at least one child in the family, which most explained was driven by the desire to ensure educational outcomes. However, although not quality unconscious, minimally engaged choosers were not necessarily active in attempting to realise quality preferences. Thus, while there were some exceptions, most minimally engaged choosers were accessing the government or private-aided school closest to the family home and showed only limited awareness of other schools in the locality or beyond. Echoing research from England concerning the choice behaviour of those who Gewirtz et al. (1995) term disconnected-local choosers, older children were also more likely to have been involved in the selection of tuition services and the decision as to whether to remain in school. For example, while she was paying for this service, Ajeeta described how her middle son had identified his own tutor and asked if he could attend:

[RA: Is there someone who recommended him [private tutor] to you?]
They choose themselves, I had no clue [...] His friend had told him
[about the tutor].

(Ajeeta, mother; Location C; government school)

¹⁰⁶ Specifically, the death of a parent and a very recent move to Delhi.

In terms of quality perceptions, minimally engaged choosers tended to emphasize the importance of children being ‘cared for’ and relatively general aspects of school functionality in their articulations of school quality (see table 7.1), and discussed desired outcomes in general terms of ‘becoming educated’. For example:

A good school is one which has clean toilets, which provides clean drinking water to students and where students do not get into fights with each other. Also, a good school gives good education; it has good teachers. [...] Basically, a good school is one which gives good education to students.

(Janvi, mother; Location A, government school)

At the same time, while some minimally engaged choosers expressed an inability to judge quality effectively, an issue I address in Chapter 9, others were relatively ambivalent about school-level quality indicators beyond a concern with children’s security, asserting that outcomes depended primarily on children’s effort:

It depends on the children. It doesn’t matter what [the] school is like, if they want to study, they will.

(Loshini mother; Location A, government school)

However, minimally engaged choosers should not be understood as unconscious of school quality in all ways or not aspirational in any sense for their children’s futures. Indeed, in the absence of a legal requirement for children’s school enrolment or attendance (see p. 55), the very act of enrolling a child in school at all should be considered an active one and, as I explain in Chapters 8 and 9, may have entailed considerable tenacity. However, I use the term minimally engaged to convey the fact that such parents’ articulations of quality were both relatively general and that quality perceptions had not necessarily led to specific schooling choices being pursued.

By contrast, parents who I classify as *aspirational choosers*, stressed the importance of specific educational outcomes, primarily English language skills and computer skills in their articulations of quality, as well as associated academic

proxies such as advanced academic curriculum topics (see table 7.1). Social outcomes concerning children acquiring 'good manners' (sub-categories included speaking well, good behaviour, and showing respect) were also important for this group. Furthermore, perceived quality and the desire to realise key educational outcomes were described by aspirational choosers as the driving factors underlying schooling decisions.

Although the distinctive mix of schools of different localities influenced choice outcomes, with a selective government school in Location A and at least one private-aided schools in Location B seen as acceptable alternatives, choices for aspirational choosers focused on the unaided private sector. Indeed, 'mainstream' government schools were generally rejected as lacking any manifestation of quality and completely excluded from the choice landscape. For example:

The teachers do not turn up, the kids do not study. They do not teach anything in these government schools.

(Sai, father; Location B, private unaided and aided schools)

Reflecting the significance of affordability in enabling access to fee-paying private schooling, mothers in such households were more likely to be employed in paid work and/or to have fathers in relatively well-paid, secure jobs within the contexts of the localities than disengaged and minimally engaged choosers. Aspirational choosers were also more likely to have attended higher levels of schooling than minimally engaged and disengaged choosers, although there were notable exceptions to this within the data set. Indeed, parents with no formal education sometimes referred to this as a key rationale for their engagement with their children's schooling, a finding I explore further in Chapter 8. Furthermore, parents who were not necessarily highly paid but who were working in relatively higher income contexts, such as in the homes of wealthy families or in offices, described how this experience had informed their perspective on their children's schooling. For example:

The reason for me to educate them is because I regret it. I work at a very good place. There I see people who are very qualified – with MBAs and BAs – and yet they [still] study. So, I regret it because if I had an educated person's job, I would have a starting salary of 20,000 or 30,000 [Rs]. The thought that if I had an education I too could have got such a job stays in my mind.

(Neel, father; Location C, unaided private and government schools)

Thus, 'social exposure' seemed to be important to the value that some aspirational choosers placed on educational outcomes in shaping their schooling decisions.

As I elaborate in Chapter 9, the decision to invest financial resources in children's education in the pursuit of specific academic outcomes was one way in which aspirational choosers leveraged capitals strategically in choice processes. This includes the use of private tuitions as a strategy for ensuring quality outcomes and/or overcoming quality failures in schools. Hence, as was the case for minimally engaged choosers, most aspirational choosers were accessing private tuitions as part of a wider investment in their children's education. For example, Bhavna explained that tuitions were one strategy for ensuring that her children did not fall behind during the school holidays:

They don't discontinue going there even during the two-month long summer holidays. They have been going there since First or Second [Class].

(Bhavna, mother; Location B, unaided private schools)

Aspirational choosers were thus actively engaged in attempting to fulfil educational aspirations through their choice-making. However, it is important to clarify at this stage that I do not mean to imply that aspirational choosers could be classified as skilled or semi-skilled choosers, as in in Gewirtz et al.'s (1995) conceptualisation, or that aspirational choosers were necessarily successful in accessing the quality schooling that they desired.

Community choosers were parents who had chosen to prioritise specific community affiliations in their schooling decisions. Such parents were not unconscious of school and educational quality, or unconcerned with children's learning outcomes. Indeed, most community choosers, as for minimally engaged

and aspirational choosers, were accessing private tuitions and connected this decision to academic objectives. However, such parents were also explicit in conveying that schooling choices had not been determined by quality perceptions. As a way of capturing the rationality in play here, I use the term *forging solidarities* to convey the deliberate course of action taken by community choosers to build and to maintain connections with other households along specific identity constructs as articulated through schooling choices. Shaped by the distinctive mix of schools and socio-cultural backgrounds of households in the localities, the schooling choices of community choosers varied by locality, with particular aspects of social identity - associated with particular schools - taking on an enhanced significance. I discuss specific examples in relation to case sites later in this chapter in relation to religious and regional identities (see section 7.4), and thus limit my account of this type of chooser here to a focus on the prioritisation of social identity factors over perceived quality factors.

Across the data set, aspirational choosers and minimally engaged choosers were fairly evenly split, while community choosers represented around a sixth of parent interviewees (largely limited to Location B) and, as already noted, I identified only a very small proportion of disengaged choosers. However, it is important to note that I was perhaps more likely to recruit more aspirational choosers given the subject of the study and what may have been greater enthusiasm for discussing children's education amongst this group, which may have skewed the sample.

Table 7.2 Parent choice groups by case site

Choice group	Location			All
	A	B	C	
Disengaged	1	1	0	2
Minimally engaged	10	7	4	21
Aspirational	9	15	2	26
Community	0	7	2	9
Total	20	30	8	58

Source: parent interview data

In drawing attention to these categories and to associated school enrolment

patterns within the data, it is also important to point out that 15 of the 58 families interviewed for the study were accessing multiple school types for different children within the family (see Table 6.8, p. 203). Categories of parent chooser were thus not static in the sense of being associated with the choice of only one school type across all children in the family, although, as I have noted above, they were associated with certain familial characteristics and schooling decisions. Equally, as I will go on to explain in Chapter 8, interview data indicate that parents or other relatives within one family could belong to different choice categories.

Having outlined key categories of parent choosers, which I go on to develop in more detail in the following chapters of this thesis, I now turn to a more detailed examination of key distinctions that parents drew between schools based on their perceptions of school quality. As I explain, this reveals how academic and social aspirations intertwined to inform choice-making across case sites.

7.3 Quality proxies/social proxies: English and private unaided schools

In this section, I focus on the desirability of unaided private schooling across case sites, identifying ‘English’ and ‘private’ as key proxies that parents applied for all other quality indicators. Indeed, while there were a small number of accounts of government school quality within the data set, across all case sites, all aspects of school quality were associated with unaided private schooling, however articulated and whether parents had chosen to prioritise quality in their decision-making. Aspirational choosers, however, tended to be more explicit than other parent choosers as to the perceived poor quality of government schooling in direct comparison with private schooling, linking this to the decision to attempt to exit the government sector, at least for some children within the family:

We run towards private [schools] nowadays because we know the quality of education in government [schools] [...] There is a world of difference [between private and government schools], like between the earth and the sky.

(Laila, daughter; Location A, unaided private and government schools)

Such narratives echo the findings of Srivastava (2005), and the reflections of Subrahmanian (2006), Sarangapani & Mukhopadhyay (in press) and others, who identify the widespread circulation of discourses of derision (Ball, 1990) concerning the government school sector in India, as I outlined in Chapter 2. To understand the basis of such quality perceptions within local markets, however, it is necessary to examine how such perceptions and preferences were formed. This is important given the contested nature of private school quality in the research literature (see section 3.3.2) and the lack of any standardised assessment data at the elementary stage.

As Srivastava (2006) also identifies amongst households accessing LFP schools, even amongst aspirational choosers there was little evidence of direct comparison between schools and few parents across all localities had visited schools that they characterised as either ‘good’ or ‘poor’ during interviews. Hence, rather than knowledge gained from direct observation of current schooling practices, it was ‘hot’ knowledge (Ball & Vincent, 1998)¹⁰⁷ and parents’ own educational experiences that emerged as most important in shaping overall discourses of school quality in each of the localities. Aspirational choosers with experience of formal education, for example, cited their ‘first-hand’ knowledge of schooling to support their reflections on school quality. For example:

[RA: Why and how have you come to feel that the level of education in government schools is so low?]

That’s because we ourselves have studied in government schools. We exactly know what happens there. Teachers come to schools, they gossip around, someone is knitting a sweater, someone [pause]. You must know it all [by now]. No-one is concerned about kids’ education, whether they are studying or not, no-one bothers with that.

(Rakesh, uncle; Location B, unaided private schools)

The relationship between personal experience and quality perceptions illuminates one aspect of the relationship between parental biography and choice, with

¹⁰⁷ See p. 68, footnote 35.

biography an important but often overlooked influence on parents' schooling decisions (Drury, 1993). Equally, the above extract reveals how subjective individual experiences may feed into a broader narrative of government school failures within localities. Rakesh does not present his school experience some 20 years prior as isolated, for example, but as typical across the government sector in the present day. That individual government schools may offer quality education is also framed as an impossibility.

In addition to such personal experiences, rumour and gossip fed into quality perceptions and unsubstantiated narratives within localities that centred on government school failures. One mother's account of her reasons for choosing a local private school for her son, for example, captures some of the local gossip concerning government schools:

Students of government schools run away from there during half break
[...] I felt my child cannot even talk properly, he doesn't know how to
speak to people and if someone takes him away, what would I do.

[RA: So students run away from government schools?]

Yes, they do that during half break.

[RA: This problem exists in all government schools nearby?]

Yes, in all of them. Children scale these walls and run away.
(Ridika, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

To classify Ridika's account as gossip is not to conclude that children running away from schools at break time was not an issue in the area. However, such examples draw attention to 'the power of the negative story, the destructive anecdote' (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p. 379) in discourses surrounding government school quality, whereby such accounts transform individual experiences into universal 'truths'. Similarly, stories surrounding an apparent 'incident' at one government school in Location B, for example - one parent reported that a wall had fallen that children could now climb over to 'escape', another that a woman had been killed when a wall collapsed – reflected how negative stories spread and shifted within local networks, ultimately contributing to a narrative across the locality of this particular school as

‘dangerous’ and to be avoided that for some further extended, as in Ridika’s account, to government schooling as a whole.

At the same time, comparison between government and private schools was found to be largely abstract across case sites, in the sense that private schooling was frequently assumed to be ‘better’, irrespective of direct experience. Thus, while most parents across all groups of parent chooser and all localities drew a distinction between private and government schools, this was often expressed in vague terms. For example:

[RA: What do you think is the difference between education in a government and a private school?]

There is a lot of difference in a private school. Private school is much better [...] Private schools cannot be the way government schools are.
(Neeti, mother; Location B, private aided school)¹⁰⁸

This is not to dismiss what may be significant quality failings within government schools, which have been documented extensively in existing research (e.g. PROBE team, 1999). However, the judgement that fee-paying schools were of superior quality based solely on the fact that they were fee-paying seemed to be common across case sites, although again this was expressed in relatively general terms, as Sunita, an aspirational chooser, related with respect to the school she had chosen for her son:

When they take so much fee obviously they would teach well.
(Sunita, mother; Location C, unaided private school)

Such quality assumptions were not always borne out in parents’ experiences of the private sector in practice, a finding I discuss in Chapter 9. Nevertheless, the associations between price and quality were pronounced across case sites, in the sense that costlier schools were more likely to be cited as the ‘best’ schools that parents knew of.

¹⁰⁸ Neeti referred to her sons’ school as a government school during the interview, as did other parents accessing this school. Even at secondary level, fees at this school were minimal at Rs. 150 per annum, which may have contributed to this impression.

In this way, the superiority of high fee private schools tended to be asserted based on 'gut feel' rather than specific quality indicators by both aspirational and minimally engaged choosers. For example, Arjun, a minimally engaged chooser, described how the differences and superior quality of schools accessed by wealthy families were 'obvious' without having access to 'cold' knowledge (Ball & Vincent, 1998) in this regard:

I mean rich families send their children to such schools [referring to a high fee school elsewhere in Delhi]. Kids would naturally learn better in such schools, not in government schools.

[...]

[RA: How do know that their studies are different from what your kids are studying? I mean how did you get to know that?]

Theirs is different. It's very obviously visible that everything is different. This much information everyone has about their education, we don't need to have a look at their books to know that! One can make that out by having a look at their kids, everything related to them [pause] their fashion. It's quite understandable that they are educating their kids in such good schools. And their education is not quite the same.

(Arjun, father; Location B, private aided school)

There is a suggestion of what could be conceptualised as tacit knowledge in Arjun's account, where differences between the education in schools is something 'known' somewhat implicitly, although the inadequacies of such a mechanism in disseminating market information is revealed through the connections that Arjun makes between social status and school quality. Indeed, rather than a focus on school-based factors, Arjun's reference to aesthetics in terms of children's dress represents a decoding of social class signifiers in relation to consumer choices and associated 'tastes' (Bourdieu, 1984). The social spaces of such higher fee schools are thus recognised as in-tune with the habitus of their wealthy clientele, while Arjun's acceptance that the schools accessed by his own family will be different also seems to suggest a version of what Reay & Ball (1997) argue is the 'common-sense logic' (p. 91) that shapes some working-class parents' choice-making in the English

context. Differences between institutions are thus ‘quite understandable’, with the added implication that such higher fee schools are distinct from those that are accessed by families like Arjun’s own. In this way, we may appreciate how educational aspirations and the extent to which quality perceptions play a role in choice-making may be shaped by the normalisation and internalisation of social inequalities whereby some spaces are seen as the ‘natural’ choice for some families and not for others (Bourdieu, 1990a).

The relationship between fee paying private schooling and social class has been noted by other commentators in the Indian education context, who have focused on the desirability of English-medium schooling: ‘In India, the phrase ‘private school’ historically and currently in everyday discourse is used to signal two main qualities: the use of English as a medium of instruction and the requirement of a fee which conveys exclusivity and social status’ (Sarangapani & Winch, 2010, p. 503). In the following section, I turn to examine the perceived relationship between English-medium education and fee-paying private schooling in parents’ articulations of school quality.

7.3.1 English as a proxy quality indicator

Knowledge of English as a key educational outcome, associated with both employability and social prestige, was found to shape parental schooling choices and quality perceptions across all study sites. Indeed, English was the most common answer in response to questions about ‘good’ schooling, whether parents had prioritised this in their choice-making or felt able to do so. For example:

[Name redacted] is a good school; its medium of teaching is English.

(Janvi, mother; Location A, government school)

Furthermore, English was associated with private schooling almost exclusively, as other researchers of the LFP sector have identified (see Tooley et al, 2007; Härmä, 2011). As one aspirational chooser, Garima, put it:

Today, English matters a lot and no parent wants to send their child to a government school. There is no education in government schools anymore.

(Garima, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

The desirability and selection of English-medium schooling was framed as an issue of quality discernment, and was in this way also connected explicitly to rejection of government schooling by aspirational choosers. While desirability is not reflective of educational quality, as Sarangapani & Winch (2010) note with respect to the popularity of English-medium schooling in the Indian context, it is important to recognise the role that English played across case sites as a key choice criterion and as effectively synonymous with school quality.

While the empirical evidence on the ‘value’ of English within the labour market is limited, aspirational choosers’ focus on English-medium schooling could be understood as an economically rational decision in view of the potential for relative financial gains within the competitive employment market, reinforcing the positional good aspects of education (see section 3.3.1). For example:

When he [her son] grows up, I understand that if he studies in an English-medium school, it would be easier for him to have a job [...] We are sending him to an English-medium school so that he is able to compare better in the future.

(Aishi, mother; Location B, private school and government school)

However, it was also clear from the wider data set that the association between English-medium schooling and social privilege enhanced the desirability of English for some parents beyond what might be interpreted as a responsiveness to the dynamics of the labour market. Indeed, explaining why she felt that English-medium schooling was so important for her son, Garima noted what she perceived as the social value of English within wider society:

These days nothing else matters but the knowledge of English; you only have to speak in English and people think nothing else matters, no other knowledge [...] English is required everywhere; who speaks in Hindi these days?

(Garima)

Given that neither Garima nor many other local residents spoke English, Garima's question of 'who speaks in Hindi these days' is revealing in the implication that it is not herself nor her immediate acquaintances to whom she is referring. This draws attention to the nature of Garima's choice of English-medium schooling for her son in seeking to build the kind of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) that will provide access to a different social stratum than the one the family currently occupies. This practice of concerted cultivation (Laureau, 1987) echoes the findings of researchers elsewhere in India, who have identified English-medium education as a means of social mobility as well as a strategy for consolidating existing socioeconomic advantages (Donner, 2005; Ganguly-Scrase & Scrase, 2008; see section 3.3.3, p. 86). In this way, English functioned as 'a standard taste' (Young, 2011, p. 62) across case sites, necessitating additional expense and serving to entrench social class hierarchies by transforming English into a signifier of an aspirational middle-class identity (Fernandes, 2006). Aspirational choosers' accounts of their initial impressions of school spaces, for example, were heavily informed by this aspect of school life:

[RA: She [Eleanor] wants to know what you liked about the school when you saw it for the first time.]

First of all, we liked that not only the teachers of the school, but even the students were speaking in English. So, we thought everyone here, including the teachers, are talking in English, which doesn't happen in other schools. We thought it would be good for our child.

(Varshil, father; Location A, unaided private school)

The desirability of English not just as a discrete subject in the school, but as the 'everyday language' is suggestive of a middle-class lifestyle associated with English competency that was made further explicit in other parent choosers' accounts of school quality, whether or not they had chosen to prioritise this in their decision-making. For example, a community chooser, Siddharth, described the 'best' school he knew of in the following terms:

[RA: What is the best school that you can think of, not thinking about money?]

[Name redacted – higher fee private school]. That is a very good school. It is English-medium. Everyone speaks in English all the time. It has an English culture [...] The family I drive for, their children go there.

(Siddharth, father; Location B, private aided school)

Siddharth's characterisation of the school as having an 'English culture' is suggestive of a conception of quality that is bound up in the school's overarching ethos. In this way, English is not simply the medium of instruction, but is perceived as the 'way of life' within the school and the students who attend. That this school is also the one that Siddharth's employer's children attend also underlines the perceived relationship between English and social class that informed all parents' conceptions of school quality.

The association between English and unaided private schooling was deliberately fostered by providers within the study contexts. Across all study sites, school signs outside all unaided private schools were found to be in English, as were all websites and other written materials on the school premises. Indeed, for most lower fee schools, the only information displayed outside of schools was the advertisement of 'English-medium' instruction, whether or not this was the case in practice. Indeed, English was not a functional language within all lower and some mid fee schools that were visited during fieldwork despite advertising themselves as 'English-medium'. For example, one lower fee school in Location C displayed prominently a one-page list of school rules in the principal's office, written in formal English and hence probably inaccessible to most if not all the school's clientele. However, given that the principal in whose office it was displayed also did not speak English, it appeared the document was not designed to be functional in the most literal sense, but operated in effect as a form of 'staging' for the benefit of parent consumers.

Such fabrications and the deployment of 'English-medium' as in effect a brand identity within education markets find some resonance with Ball's (2000) description of the increased significance of promotional work in the English education system:

Within the education market institutional promotion and representation take on the qualities of postmodern depthlessness - yet more floating signifiers in the plethora of semiotic images, spectacles and fragments that increasingly dominate consumer society. Indeed, the particular disciplines of competition encourage schools and universities to 'fabricate' themselves - to manage and manipulate their performances in particular ways.

(p. 10)

Similarly, the impression management work of unaided private schools in India fosters the association between English and elite education whereby 'English-medium' is transformed into a 'floating signifier' within education markets, carrying with it a social message to be decoded by market consumers. The extent to which promises of English-medium schooling were borne out in practice, however, was also questionable, an issue I return to in Chapter 9 in relation to parents' ability to judge children's learning. Before this, I build on the identification of the association between English-medium schooling and social status to examine how the perceived social composition of school spaces also enhanced the desirability of unaided private schooling for aspirational choosers.

7.3.2 The social composition of school spaces

Aside from English language alone, the association between private schooling and social aspirations was further evident in aspirational choosers' comments around 'wanting something better' for their children. For example, Varshil, who described liking that his daughter's school was English-medium, shared what was a broader desire for his children to attend private schools:

I have a dream that while I have studied in a government school, my children should go to a private school like other children.

(Varshil, father; Location A, unaided private school)

Given that a large proportion of children in the area where Varshil and his family lived were attending government schools, there is an aspirational implication in Varshil's reference to wanting his children to attend private school 'like other children'. This was made more explicit later in the interview when Varshil noted that

the school he was planning to send his daughters to the following year attracted clientele from a high-income area close to the basti: 'Children from large homes also study there'.

A discernible trend amongst aspirational choosers across the data set centred on the behaviour of children, with broad generalisations concerning private school children compared to government school children:

Children are taught manners in private schools; whereas in government schools, teachers give them work to do and some options and then get busy among themselves.

[RA: What do you mean by manners?]

Like, they are taught to behave in front of others.

(Ridika, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Here, as in many of the comments surrounding private and government schooling, a contrast is drawn between the children who occupy different school spaces. In particular, while a perception of poor quality teaching and supervision within government schools is also implied, it was notable that comments concerning government school quality from aspirational choosers tended to centre on the children who attended such schools and reflected a preoccupation with conceptions of discipline related to self-presentation:

Those government schools which are till Class V [i.e. MCD schools] aren't very good. I mean, children go there for the heck of it; they don't learn anything and they are also not clean. In private school, they teach them everything, like how to wear their uniform properly; they even have to iron their dress in a proper manner. But these things are not taught in a government school.

(Nimi, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

The children complained about the atmosphere of that [government] school. The other boys there were dirty and they didn't like it. They only stayed for two days, within two days we realised that it was not good so we went to [private school].

(Kayaan, father; Location B, private aided school)

These comments characterising government school children as poorly dressed and dirty reflect something of a preoccupation with cleanliness, which may be connected to caste-based rules concerning religious purity (Sriprakash, 2012), that was evident more widely within the interview data. In this way, there are also echoes here of what Bourdieu (2010) identifies as the conscious and unconscious ways in which ‘members of a group seek to distinguish themselves from the group below (or believe to be so)’ (p. 244) through references to cleanliness and uncleanness:

Even when it is in no way inspired by the conscious concern to stand aloof from working-class laxity, every petit-bourgeois profession of rigour, every eulogy of the clean, sober and neat, contains a tacit reference to uncleanness, in words or things, to intemperance or imprudence.

(ibid.)

Thus, while parents generally avoided direct caste and class-based language to characterise government school children, discourse surrounding discipline and cleanliness should be understood as carrying social significance beyond a concern with basic hygiene. However, the connection between schooling, caste and social status was made more explicit by parents in some instances, as in the following example:

[RA: Have you seen any difference in education in all these years?]

Government schools are doing better than before and of course there are many new private schools [...] Even poor children can study now. They are given food, lunch.

[RA: Have you ever seen what kind of food they are given?]

Yes, but our children don’t eat that kind of food [...] By the way, our children take their food from home.

(Sunita, mother; Location C, unaided private school)

The preparation and sharing of food is significant because of caste rules concerning religious ritual purity; Appadurai (1981) notes how food consumption practices act as ‘the semiotic instrument of Hindu ideas of rank and distance’ (p. 497). The provision of free midday meals in government schools would seem in this instance

to function as a social indicator, with Sunita's rejection of it unequivocal in the distinction she draws between her own household and others within the locality. While the evidence is limited, the choice of private schooling by some aspirational choosers could thus have been a way of drawing both a symbolic and a literal delineation between their own family and others within the local area, with the consumption of private schooling functioning as a conscious strategy of social differentiation. At the same time, discourse concerning the social composition of different schools seemed to feed into broader discourses of derision surrounding government schooling and parental conceptions of 'good' and 'bad' schooling options that seemed to be internalised more unconsciously.

The associations between government schooling and 'poor quality' should thus be understood as socially situated, with quality perceptions sensitive to social distinctions as well as educational indicators, as empirical studies of school choice in other countries have also found (e.g. West & Noden, 2003; see section 3.4.2), although this has specific inflections in the Indian context. The emphasis on the production of quality through parental choice may thus undermine the social good aspects of education, as discussed in Chapter 3, by emphasising the positional good aspects of education and simultaneously reinforcing certain forms of schooling as markers of social status.

7.4 Community choosers: forging solidarities

In addition to the significance of 'English-medium' as a brand buzzword within education markets, school-level data illuminated the attentiveness of private schools to social identity factors in shaping their own brand identities in efforts to attract parent consumers. In some unaided private schools in Location C, this included offering Urdu language classes for Muslim pupils, while other private aided and unaided schools accessed by parents in Locations A and B utilised visual identifiers of religious affiliation, such as the use of the *khanda*¹⁰⁹ on school signs, or religious imagery in school reception areas. Similarly, a mid fee, unrecognised private school

¹⁰⁹ The emblem of Sikhism.

in Location B was found to offer a parallel curriculum for Afghan migrant students, at an additional cost, which school authorities interpreted as an effort to cater for the growth of an Afghan community in a nearby area in recent years. This apparent attempt to establish a 'niche' within the wider school market illustrates the significance of identity to choice-making through the transformation of aspects of social identity into consumer choices within education markets.

Indeed, in addition to conceptions of school quality, a distinct group of parents were identified as distinguishing between schools based on community affiliations. In this way, the practice of *forging solidarities* – a term I use to signify the use of schooling choices to build or to preserve relationships with particular households - was significant in shaping conceptions of school suitability. In conceptualising this trend, I use the word 'forging' rather than maintaining because of how such affiliations may take on a new significance due to changes in family circumstance or the socio-cultural contexts of local areas over time. For example, for some migrant families, their regional identity may have taken on a new significance after having moved to Delhi. Other researchers have also noted how religious identity may become important to school selection in some contexts as a strategy of solidarity and protection (Matthan et al., 2014).

To illustrate forging solidarities in action, I focus on a sub-community in Location B, which was home to many families who identified as being from Tamil Nadu. Despite this area of the basti being one of the most visibly low income, it was found that many families were choosing to send their children to a private aided school offering instruction in Tamil, located at some distance from the basti and necessitating additional expenses for both school fees past Class VIII and transport costs.

The findings suggest that the emphasis placed on Tamil schooling was connected to feelings of belonging, pride in regional identity and resistance to unilateral assimilation. This was most evident when parents were asked their reasons for choosing this particular school for their children:

No, no other schools were on my mind because I only wanted to send them to a Tamil language school.

[RA: When did you come to know that there is this [Tamil-medium school] here?]

We always knew this. It is [location].

[RA: Are there other schools in this area about which you did not know? Did you ask your neighbour or...?]

Actually, that is the only point, that it is a Tamil school.
(Ravi, father; Location B, private aided school)

She [her daughter] has to learn Tamil for her marriage, so it is important for her to know Tamil.
(Latcha, mother; Location B, private aided school)

This emphasis placed on Tamil-medium schooling by parents, many of whom were second generation migrants to Delhi, was indicative of a (re)forging of solidarities based on regional identity both for themselves and for the next generation, as seen in the assumption that Latcha's daughter will go to Tamil Nadu for her marriage. In this way, schooling seemed to be performing an important function of community socialisation and the maintenance of familial connections by migrant families, with some parents emphasising the importance of children learning Tamil to support the continued connections between households and their extended families:

[RA: Why is it important to learn Tamil?]

Well, what if my young child, suppose her grandfather comes to visit her from Tamil Nadu? She must be able to speak to him, she must be able to understand him, they must be able to talk. So it is very important for her to learn Tamil.
(Vikram, father; Location B, private aided school)

It is important to note that community choosers were not necessarily unconscious of school and educational quality, but that a defining feature of such choosers was that community solidarities were prioritised above perceived quality. For example:

It is a Tamil school. They teach Tamil, Hindi and English there, which is good. I am Tamil and I am proud to send my children to a Tamil school.

[...]

[RA: Do you think it is a good school?]

Compared to others I think it is OK. But it is not a good education [...] The principal is not good. There is no order there, children just sit around and do not work.

(Siddharth, father; Location B, private aided school)

At the same time, while the Tamil-medium school was by far the most popular choice within this locality, five of the Tamil parents who were interviewed were identified as ‘going against the grain’ and not selecting this school.¹¹⁰ In one instance this decision was attributed at least in part to affordability, but for the other four households the driving factor was identified as school quality. For example:

[RA: What about the [Tamil-medium] school? A lot of people in this area are sending their children there.]

The [Tamil-medium] school? No, not [that school]. The past generation studied there, the older people in the community, everyone studied there. But now there are better options.

(Sanjana, mother; Location B, private school)

For aspirational choosers such as Sanjana, in addition to the better-quality education that she felt was on offer at the private school that her son attended, the association of the Tamil school with the ‘past generation’ of the community suggests that the school was, in her view, an ‘old-fashioned’ choice. While the evidence here is limited, the role of schooling in processes of socialisation is likely to be particularly pertinent for migrant families where schooling choices may either be used to maintain existing connections or to forge new solidarities in processes of community assimilation,

¹¹⁰ Having identified the Tamil medium school as extremely popular within this community, I deliberately sought out perspectives from parents who had chosen not to send their child to this school.

echoing Douglas & Isherwood's (1979) reflection that objects of consumption may be used as both 'fences or bridges' (p. 12) in different social contexts.

In this respect, it is also important to recognise the possible influence of the underlying community tensions surrounding the Tamil community in Location B, as I previously identified in Chapter 6, on schooling choices. While the evidence is limited, two mothers who were not accessing the Tamil school reported that they and/or their child experienced discriminatory treatment in their school, which these mothers connected to their South Indian provenance (I return to this topic in Chapter 9, section 9.5). The salience of community identity and the choice of the Tamil-medium school may thus have been a strategy of protection for some parents in anticipation of discrimination. Connected to this, it may also be the case that the schooling choices of the community were also reflected in – and to some extent fed into – the unseen divisions that could be observed in the organisation of living arrangements within the wider social space (Massey, 1994). Indeed, while no formal barriers were present between different parts of the basti, the Tamil community was 'grouped' in one area,¹¹¹ with apparently little intermingling between households.

In Location C, a similar trend of school selection in apparent solidarity with other households could also be identified within two Muslim households. For example, Sadiq said that he has chosen to send his child to a private school in the local vicinity because other households in the area were already accessing the school:

[RA: Why did you choose this particular school? Did you visit it beforehand and did you talk to people about the school?]

Actually, a lot of children from the colony go to this school and also those from the family. So this is the only thing I thought of and nothing else.

(Sadiq, father; Location C, unaided private school)

Sadiq's choice of this school could be interpreted as an example of consumer herding behaviour, whereby consumers follow the crowd because of a belief that others are

¹¹¹ Such household 'groupings' were also identified amongst Nepalese families in another area of Location B and Sikh families from Rajasthan in Location A, although data is limited and ambiguous as to whether the schooling choices of these groups were driven by community solidarities.

better informed (Baddeley, 2010). However, the significance of this choice of school in terms of social identity became explicit in Sadiq's discussion of the popularity of private schooling amongst Muslim families in the area and the discrimination that he felt that Muslim children had experienced at local government schools:

The government schools here have all facilities but those [Muslim] children do not get anything; they are not treated well.

[RA: Can you give us some examples why you felt...?]

We eat meat in our home and when the child goes to school, often we pack meat in their lunches. But school authorities do not like meat to be sent to school, so we started giving them eggs. But they are even made to throw away the eggs [...] All non-vegetarian food is thrown away. Children are scolded and often beaten for carrying non-vegetarian food. These schools are not madrasas; they are neither temples nor churches. Still teachers behave like this.

(Sadiq)

A perception of discrimination based on religious identity within certain schools in the area, in this case government schools as a broad category, thus played a significant role in Sadiq's decision to send his son to an unaided private school. This observation was echoed by the other community chooser from this locality, Nazir, who emphasised within our interview his perception of anti-Muslim discrimination by teachers at his older nephew's government school as part of the reason underlying the decision to send his younger nephew to an unaided private school.¹¹² Hence, what could be interpreted as a following-the-crowd decision ('a lot of children from this colony go to this school') may also be understood as both an expression of solidarity with other households and an avoidance of schools where children of minority religious backgrounds may experience discrimination, reflecting the observations of Matthan et al. (2014), who link the renewed popularity of Urdu medium schooling in Ahmedabad to the legacy of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002. While not as evident in the spatial layout of the community as in Location B, the cultural history of the locality, and specifically the history of religious violence in

¹¹² Concerns over violence more generally with all-boys government schools also formed a part of the decision by Nazir's family to exit the government sector.

the area (see section 6.6), should, therefore, be understood as playing a significant role in shaping both more contemporary social relations within the locality and schooling choices within this context. This includes the importance afforded to community solidarities in relation to quality. Sadiq, for example, while not quality unconscious, appeared to identify quality as a secondary concern compared to community-level factors:

Otherwise, this is a very tough area and I cannot have too many expectations from a school. I just want to give a good environment to my child.

(Sadiq)

Narratives of choice preferences by community choosers thus illuminate that learning outcomes and other educational aims were not necessarily the only factors that parents considered when making schooling choices for their children. The necessity of paying analytic attention to the locally situated community dynamics that produce these viewpoints and associated choice preferences is equally apparent. Extending this argument concerning socio-cultural factors in educational decision-making, in the next section of this chapter I explain how gender was also a key factor underlying choice-making across all case sites and all groups of parent chooser.

7.5 Gender, quality and 'security'

Earlier in this chapter, I identified four categories of parent chooser, which I argue are helpful in interpreting school enrolment patterns across the various case sites. In this section, I add nuance to this categorisation effort to argue that operating across the spectrum of chooser types, gender norms served to shape conceptions of suitable schooling options and the emphasis afforded to specific quality criteria.

In addition to quality and the influence of community level factors on decision-making, distance was a commonly mentioned factor in parents' decision-making. Echoing the findings of other studies of school choice in a range of national contexts, schools 'close to home' were associated with convenience and at a broad level with children's safety (Verger et al., 2017). However, distance was found to be

a relative construct that varied according to various factors, including economic status and specific geographic barriers such as main roads and railway tracks that placed restrictions on available schooling options. For example:

I thought it is close by and we don't have to worry about sending them in a bus. If we put them here [referring to a different school across a main road] then we need to worry a lot about the traffic.

(Nina, mother; Location C, unaided private and government schools)

However, notions of acceptable distance and 'safety' were found to vary according to a child's gender, with schools closer to the family home generally regarded as preferable for girls. Indeed, choosing a school close to home was linked explicitly to concerns over sexual violence by a small number of parents in all case sites. For example:

After the rape cases,¹¹³ I don't want to send them a faraway distance. My daughter was the only one in the van [on the journey to her old school]. I felt afraid for her, you can't trust anyone.

(Simran, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

The influence of conceptions of safety on girls' freedom of movement also became apparent in other ways during fieldwork. In Location B, for example, I observed mothers escorting their daughters to the toilet block and waiting outside for them, reflecting safety concerns about this area of the basti (see section 6.4). Indeed, a general acceptance that the movement of women and girls was shaped by the risk of sexual violence permeated across the data set:

I do prefer not to leave my house after dark. This is because I have often heard that girls were eve-teased¹¹⁴ by the men, or the men tried to force themselves on the girls.

(Sakshi, NGO worker and Location B resident)

¹¹³ During the interview, I understood this to be a reference to the high-profile rape and murder of a young woman in South Delhi in 2012. However, Simran may have been referring to other incidents in the more local area or across Delhi. Drache & Velagic (2013) report that stories of rape in the Indian media increased by 30% following the 2012 incident.

¹¹⁴ A term used to denote the sexual harassment of girls/women by boys/men in public spaces.

As in many countries, sexual and other forms of violence have long been identified as significant issues facing women and girls in India. Vaid (2017) also notes Delhi's reputation as unsafe for women, with travel within the city identified by the women interviewed for her study as particularly dangerous.

While not diminishing the very real dangers that women and girls face in terms of sexual and other forms of violence, it is important to note that 'prevention strategies' centring on the behaviour of women and girls, including their movement outside of the family home, serve to restrict freedoms and may contribute to a reinforcement of gender stereotypes of women requiring extra protection rather than challenging individual perpetrators or the wider patriarchy (Bamal & Saharan, 2014). In school choice processes, the effect of this may be seen in inequalities of access to services such as education, whereby distance may be prioritised for girls over quality criteria and justified based on safety concerns. As Goswami (2015) notes:

A completely dysfunctional school may be seen as providing minimum control on women simply by virtue of its location; a nearby school minimises the fear of safety while commuting. It functions by keeping the daughters within a range of movement which is considered safe.
(p. 260)

The importance of proximity that Goswami (2015) identifies, which also intertwined with broader gendered conceptions of safety that served to shape choice criteria and parental conceptions of suitable schooling options, resonates with some of the parent interview data gathered as part of the current study.

In addition to proximity, the choice of single-sex schooling for girls by some parents could also be understood as a further 'strategy of control' (Goswami, 2015, p. 260) when engaging with children's education (see also Kelly & Bhabha, 2014). Single-sex schools were thus preferred by some parents across study sites, who spoke about their feeling that an all-girls environment was a safe space for girls:

I think a good school should provide good education and secondly, there should be good teachers. We hear a lot of bad things on TV these days. In my daughter's school, there are only female teachers. No question of having a male teacher in a girls' school. So girls are safe and education is good.

(Parmita, mother; Location B, government schools)

One mother, whose daughter had attended school only until Class V, also expressed her view that co-educational spaces were not safe spaces for girls because of a perceived lack of control by teachers over boys' behaviour:

They don't know how to discipline students, how to control them. If they can't do these simple things, how can we send our daughters to schools? Should we not say that the teachers actually encourage this kind of behaviour by not controlling that?

[RA: Encouragement of what?]

Boys have got freedom to misbehave with girls. You can't trust teachers and masters.

(Rekha, mother; Location B, government school)

In addition to concerns over sexual harassment in school spaces, and perceived disciplinary problems, it is also important to consider the extent to which the anxieties surrounding girls' safety reflected traditional gender ideologies of seclusion and segregation. The evidence in this respect is limited. However, later in her interview, Parmita elaborated on her fears surrounding her daughter's safety in school, which suggests that a more nuanced understanding of her choice of single-sex schooling for her daughter is required, particularly in the context of her discussion elsewhere in the interview of the importance of securing a 'good match' for her daughter's marriage:

Some days back, my daughter's friend told her she has a boyfriend and asked her to accompany them somewhere. But my daughter politely refused. I scolded her friend and told my daughter that schools are meant to study and not make boyfriends. If all girls go wayward like this [pause] my children are not allowed to interact with anyone.

(Parmita, mother; Location B, government schools)

Thus, it is important to recognise that the issue of girls' safety may include a concern for their sexual modesty – and the associated policing of their behaviour (Connell, 1987) - in addition to issues of immediate security. Given that the single-sex and distance criteria also meant that girls' range of movement and social relationships outside of the family home were closely regulated, individual schooling decisions may serve to reinforce the gender order through the structuring of social relationships and personal attachments (Connell, 1987). The internalisation of the gender order by mothers as manifested in the restrictions and expectations surrounding daughters' behaviour is also apparent. Indeed, Parmita noted that she was more concerned with her son's education than her daughter's ('I can't say about my daughter because she belongs to her in-laws' house'), a sentiment that was echoed across case sites in comments around girls' anticipated post-schooling trajectories and marriage prospects. For example:

In this community, it is better that a girl is educated. Everybody wants an educated girl these days.

(Ganika, mother; Location A, government schools)

Thus, while education was valued for girls, at least partly due to what were seen to be advantages on the marriage market,¹¹⁵ such aspirations needed to be managed within cultural norms of acceptable conduct and the preservation of girls' 'modesty'.

At the same time, both cost considerations and safety concerns may have intersected to shape some parents' overall conceptions of 'suitable' schooling options for girls. This is a good example of why focusing on local education markets is helpful in illuminating the role of gender considerations in shaping schooling choices and enrolment patterns. In particular, the only all-girls government school in Location A, which has a majority intake from Class VI upwards,¹¹⁶ attracted positive comments from parents and was a very popular option for daughters due to its single-sex status and proximity to the basti. At the same time, the equivalent all-boys' government school in Location A was characterised as unsuitable by several

¹¹⁵ Echoing the findings of Srivastava (2006) and Chopra (2005); see Chapter 3, p. 88.

¹¹⁶ See Appendix H.

parents because of concerns about peer-to-peer violence, resonating with findings of other empirical studies in Delhi that have identified a concern amongst parents surrounding bullying and violence in all-boys schools (Noronha & Srivastava, 2013).¹¹⁷ Importantly, such concerns formed a part of the reasons some parents gave for sending their sons to private schools at the lower primary stage. For example, Geetha had chosen to send her son to a lower fee private school outside of the local area to ensure he was able to transfer to a different school after Class V, with the all-boys school in the locality an 'unsafe' option:

The [all-boys school] is not good; fights are common there.
(Geetha, mother; Location A, government and unaided private schools)

Furthermore, as Geetha explained, her son's private school was also English-medium, and this played an important part in her choice considerations as knowledge of English is a key learning outcome that she felt was important for his future. Geetha's daughter, however, remained in the local MCD school despite Geetha's dismissal of the school as poor quality in terms of teaching and learning:

It's not good there [the MCD school]; kids mostly play.
(Geetha)

Thus, the relative popularity of the MCD school for girls in Location A can be at least partially explained as a strategy for securing entry to the all-girls school, as a 'safe' option for older girls. However, this choice also necessitated a quality compromise. At the same time, education market boundaries could be extended for boys with the additional expenditure rationalised based on safety as well as quality concerns. In this way, locality is important for understanding how gender dynamics play out in practice, including the long-term strategies that underlie parents schooling decisions in the shorter term.

¹¹⁷ Concerns over peer-to-peer violence in all-boys schools and the associated selection of unaided private schools for boys were also identified in Location C.

This example also illustrates how parents can express aspirational and minimally engaged choice behaviour for different children within the same family, prioritising basic safety and distance for girls, while having different concerns over security for boys and what appeared to be higher aspirations in terms of specific educational outcomes associated with a more significant financial investment in their schooling. Such gender considerations may also be one reason why the small number of accounts of quality in the government sector across the data set in all localities focused on ‘care’ rather than educational outcomes. For example, Aishi described the reasons for her choice of a local government school for her daughter and the nature of quality within this space in the following terms:

The teachers are very good. They protect the girls in every way that they can. If there is an issue, they immediately call the parents and make them talk face to face and tell them to keep on educating their children.

(Aishi, mother; Location B, unaided private and government schools)

While emphasising care and communication with parents in her articulation of school quality, it was notable that Aishi’s son was attending an unaided private, English-medium school, a decision she explained was driven by the importance of English for boys if they are to secure ‘good’ jobs in the future (‘We don’t want him to take up a lowly [*neeche*] job’). Articulations of quality thus appeared to vary depending on gender norms, with specific educational outcomes prioritised for boys in view of anticipated post-schooling trajectories. The necessity of ensuring ‘bang for the buck’ (Kumar, 2010, p. 14) through financial investment in boys’ education is thus apparent (see section 3.3.2).

Indeed, while most parents expressed a commitment to their daughters’ education, most girls who were attending unaided private schools in all case sites either did not have brothers, or were attending school under the RtE Act 25% reservation or similar fee-free scheme, while boys tended to be prioritised for unaided private school attendance.¹¹⁸ In the following extract, Rabia mentions her

¹¹⁸ There were two exceptions to this across the data set (I discuss these instances further on p. 278).

perception of her son's intelligence and, combined with a perception that he might be less self-motivated than her daughters,¹¹⁹ implies that this influenced the decision to send him to an unaided private school:

We were thinking of putting him in a private [school]. We have only one son, you see [...] These kids [daughters] have studied. They study well. Boys get a little out of hand so I thought of this [a private school]. He has a good brain [is clever].
(Rabia, mother; Location A, government and unaided private schools)

In some households, however, this gender stereotype was somewhat subverted. While Parmita's children both attended government schools, and she herself described keeping a closer eye over her son's education, it was her daughter rather than her son who was being sent for private tuitions, with her grandmother's support:

Her maternal grandmother pays for her [...] she [her daughter] is very good in studies, has always been ahead of others. Her maternal grandmother says she should study whilst she [her grandmother] is alive.
(Parmita, mother of two, ages 13 and 17; government schools)

While the evidence is limited in this respect, the decision to spend more on boys' education, which some researchers have identified as a rational decision in view of economic imperatives and likely returns on investment (Maitra et al., 2014), could be disrupted depending on family dynamics and perceptions of ability. The role that Parmita's mother played in facilitating this arrangement also illuminates the significance of the extended family within choice processes, an issue that I go on to explore further in the following chapter.

7.6 Conclusion

Rational choice theory as applied to schooling holds that parents will prioritise

¹¹⁹ It is worth noting that sociologists in various national contexts have observed that boys are frequently stereotyped as lazy but 'naturally gifted' (Maynard, 2002; Skelton & Francis, 2003).

perceived quality in schooling decisions. However, data presented in this chapter troubles this interpretation in several ways. Affirming the value of the comparative focus on local market settings in the study design, these findings cut across the localities, but sometimes have locality specific inflections because of the way in which features of the locality, such as mix of schools, intersect with wider socio-cultural influences to shape school choices.

Firstly, given the almost universal perception that government schools are inherently of 'poor quality', rational choice theory would predict that all choosers who could afford to do so would access some form of private schooling. By contrast a simplistic assumption that 'poorer' people might not choose to spend money on schools would result in all choosers selecting the government option. The fact that there is a mix of outcomes across all three study sites indicates a more complex choice process.

Secondly, parent articulations of quality indicate that parents across all case sites were applying inadequate proxies in pursuit of academic outcomes, such as the giving of homework, advanced academic subject topics and the presence of audio-visual equipment. Thus, while parents across case sites did value quality and attempt to prioritise quality in their schooling decisions, the extent to which parental quality aspirations would be realised through related schooling decisions is questionable, an issue I return to in Chapter 9. At the same time, key proxy quality indicators identified by parents across all case sites - English and (fee-paying) private - indicate that social as well as academic aspirations were important in determining preferences for unaided private schooling, as further evidenced in discourses of derision surrounding government schools and pupils. Thus, perhaps both unconsciously and consciously, schooling choices in effect operated as a mechanism for reinforcing social differentiation and class distinctions, undermining social and common good aspects of education.

Thirdly, while social aspirations and the internalisation of associated class 'tastes' may help to explain the motivations of some parent choosers, data indicate that socio-cultural factors (social identity and gender) are also important in shaping both notions of quality and schooling decisions, as sociological studies of choice in

India and other national contexts have previously also suggested (see Chapter 3). However, while some commentators have interpreted the prioritisation of boys' education as rational given anticipated financial returns on investment (Maitra et al., 2014), this draws attention to the social justice implications of parents acting as proxy consumers in education markets. More generally, rational choice readings of education markets, manifested in the understanding that increased choice will result in improved sectoral quality, are troubled by the finding that some parents were consciously *not* prioritising quality in their schooling decisions.

Thus, in this chapter I identified four main chooser types, drawn from data across all case sites, which I argue provide a useful tool with which to interpret school choice outcomes. In the following chapter (Chapter 8) I discuss the influence of family dynamics on decision-making processes, considering in particular the role of mothers as proxy market consumers. This allows for a better understanding of some of the specific decisions made by both the minimally engaged and aspirational choosers, and further troubles the adequacy of a rational choice framework for interpreting parents' educational decisions.

CHAPTER 8

HOUSEHOLD DECISION-MAKING

School choice as mothers' work

8.1 Introduction

The analysis presented in Chapter 7 identified the sorts of school choices that different parent choosers were making for their children. However, understanding *why* some parents may be more actively engaged in seeking to access what they perceived as quality schooling requires further investigation of family decision-making dynamics. To contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the drivers behind particular educational decisions, this chapter presents an analysis of parents' accounts of how decisions were made within households. In doing so, it focuses attention on the role of mothers within such processes and identifies children's education as a space that may provide some mothers with opportunities for renegotiating power relationships within the domestic sphere.

Rational choice theory effectively assumes a unified decision-making process, in that decisions are understood as taken by a single actor. However, in practice, conflicts between members of the household may lead to a compromise between different 'choosers'. The resulting choice is thus not something that rational choice theory can explain; nor can rational choice theory help to illuminate meaning-making surrounding educational choices by different members of the family. Thus, in contrast to a rational choice approach, I draw here on Collins' (1994) concept of motherwork to better understand mothers' advocacy work for their children's education and the simultaneous negotiation of maternal authority by women from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds in a broadly patriarchal society.

I begin the chapter by considering the influence of the extended family on decision-making (section 8.2) before turning to focus on motherwork (section 8.3).

In doing so, I seek to draw linkages with research in other national contexts that have identified school choice as both a key aspect of women's labour and a practice that is shaped by social structures that constrain this work in significant ways. At the same time, I also point to the ways in which mothers' choice work may reflect a new articulation of the gender order, whereby notions of 'good mothering' are equated with an intensive engagement with children's schooling, entailing new demands on mothers as well as the possibility of transformative opportunities. As in the previous chapter, many of the findings presented here cut across the three localities but in some cases reflect different locality specific inflections that illuminate the intersectional nature of motherhood, maternal practice and, consequently, choice work.

8.2 Parents and the extended family

In accordance with what other researchers have identified as transformations in familial living arrangements in contemporary India (Sonawat, 2001; see section 3.4.4), the findings from other empirical studies of JJs in Delhi (Tsujita, 2014), and what may be anticipated in areas where living space is limited, nuclear family arrangements were common within each basti. When asked directly, most interviewees indicated that decisions were taken jointly between parents, with only five parents saying that one parent made decisions unilaterally (three fathers across Locations A and B, and two mothers in Location B; I discuss these household specifically later in this chapter).¹²⁰ However, across all case sites, the nature of such 'joint' decision-making was found to vary significantly between households, including the enduring influence of intergenerational and extended family structures.

The relevance of extended family relationships to school choice was manifested in the role that relatives played as key sources of information and support for parents, including providing practical and financial resources, as I detail further in Chapter 9. However, in accordance with the tentative change identified by Drury (1994) in this respect, most interviewees across all case sites did not

¹²⁰ Note that this does not include single-parent households.

characterise the extended family as playing a direct role in determining choices for their children's education, even when living in the same household. For example:

[RA: [Eleanor] is saying that the decision to send your son to [private school] is a big decision. So, did you discuss with your family members about it? Who takes such decisions in your family; is it you, your wife or everyone?]

No, my wife and I take such decisions. It is tough, but we have to do it for our son's future.

(Sadiq, father; Location C, unaided private school)

For those in nuclear family arrangements, that extended family members were living elsewhere in India was one reason why decision-making was most frequently reported as involving parents alone, as in Samali's case, where geographic distance had created a sense of separation from the extended family in terms of direct decision-making, at least over educational matters:

[RA: [Eleanor] wants to know that besides the husband and wife, other people in your family or in-laws, do they also decide?]

No, they don't interfere. We have our own family.

(Samali, mother; Location B, government school)

In other families, intergenerational educational disparities may have been another reason why in-laws were not deferred to in relation to decisions about children's schooling. For example, Sai, a father in Location B, noted that it was the formally educated members of the family who were drawn on in decision-making processes, signaling a shift away from traditional hierarchies whereby his father would typically have been understood as the key authority figure within the family:

My father is not educated, so he does not understand much about education and related matters. When we face a dilemma, then we go to consult my sister who is more educated than me, her husband, and my maternal uncle.

(Sai, father; Location B, aided and unaided private schools)

However, while family members did not necessarily dictate the outcome of decision-making processes, in some instances extended family members could be identified as more deeply involved in choices concerning children's schooling. This included families such as Deepika's (Location A), where, as the paternal grandmother in the home and current primary caregiver,¹²¹ she not only discussed attending meetings at her granddaughter's school but commented that she would 'rather not eat' than allow her granddaughter to move to a government school. In another example in a different locality, the maternal grandfather had clearly played a dominant role in decision-making processes for the oldest grandchild in one family:

[RA: [Eleanor] is asking why you admitted him to an English-medium...?]

My father-in-law insisted. He has five children and all of them are very well-educated. His three daughters are educated and also his two sons; even my wife. This is despite the fact that theirs was a poor family. He had decided to educate my son too.

(Sandeepan, father; Location C; unaided private and government schools)

Sandeepan's oldest son was living with his maternal grandparents in Varanasi, a city in Uttar Pradesh, and attending a private, English-medium school on a reduced-fee scholarship. Sandeepan explained that he was happy with the arrangement because he felt that his son was doing well in school. However, it appeared that the original decision was led by Sandeepan's father-in-law, who had 'insisted', rather than by Sandeepan more directly. Thus, individual extended family members could still hold some sway over children's education, even if this appeared to be in accordance with, rather than in opposition to, parents' wishes. Such accounts also illuminate how aspirational choosers within households could be extended family members rather than necessarily parents themselves.

In a different vein, the wider significance of children's education for the extended family was also identifiable in some households when the issue of dowry

¹²¹ Deepika's daughter-in-law was living with her family in Uttar Pradesh after having gone there to give birth earlier in the year; her elder granddaughter had remained in Delhi so that she could continue to attend school.

payments arose. Technically illegal, perhaps one reason why it was only mentioned by two interviewees directly (in Location B, as below, and by a mother in Location A), informal conversations with residents in all case sites indicated that the dowry system remained an anticipated part of marriage negotiations. While expressing his personal aversion to dowry payments, Krishnan expressed his view that the extended family remained significant in the maintenance of the dowry system:

[RA: You think this is still the case [the dowry system]?]

This is it, it's still like this. Now the elderly would have to be respected and agreed with. The young generation may push it hard, but elders' wishes cannot be denied. So, the [dowry] system would not end so easily and quickly.

(Krishnan, father; Location B, private aided school)

The application of different choice criteria along gendered lines as identified in Chapter 7 should thus be interpreted within the extended family context whereby, while parents may have reported making decisions 'jointly', the enduring significance of the dowry system indicates the persistence of gendered traditions and values in serving to shape the conditions in which such decisions are made, as reinforced through extended kinship connections. As I explain later in this chapter, the policing of social norms regarding the behaviour of women and girls by the extended family were also found to be significant for mothers as they undertook choice work for their children's education, including advocating for girls' education in some instances.

8.3 Motherwork

Across all case sites, data indicate that children's schooling was commonly defined as part of women's domestic responsibilities within households. This echoes the findings from a range of studies in other countries that have shown that it is very often mothers who take on the day-to-day activities regarding children's schooling (e.g. David et al., 1994; Reay, 1998; Chapman & Bhopal, 2013), as well those from India that have focused largely on the strategies of middle-class mothers surrounding their children's education that include tutoring, homework supervision, and work to

secure admission at highly desirable English-medium, private schools (e.g. Donner, 2005; Nambissan, 2010; Vincent & Menon, 2011).

In the contexts of the current study, where relatively few mothers were reported as having attended school and still fewer as having progressed to past the elementary level (see Chapter 6 and Appendix M), interview data across all case sites indicate that mothers' responsibilities for children's education included dropping off and collecting children from school and tuitions, as well as in some cases visiting school to pay fees or to meet with teachers. For example, the following extract from an interview with one father illuminates the day-to-day role that his wife took regarding their children's schooling:

[RA: This 8-year-old doll [girl], which class is she in?]

This one is 6 years of age;¹²² the other is 4; the boy is 8 years old.

[RA: No, no, [which] class?]

Mrs [my wife] will know. The other one is perhaps in LKG [Lower Kindergarten].

[RA: So they admitted him to LKG at the age of 5 years?]

No, will find out. I do not know about this thing. Mrs [my wife] will know, she is the one who goes to pay the fees.

(Neel, father; Location C, unaided private and government schools)¹²³

Thus, while he was certainly deeply invested in his children's education, Neel not only deferred to his wife about the classes his children were attending, but in doing so revealed that it was his wife who performed key activities associated with the children's schooling, such as paying the fees. Such an arrangement appeared typical within each locality, as captured in small asides during interviews as in the example above. This division of labour was further elucidated through observations in each of the localities, such as the number of women outside school gates at the end of the school day. Fathers who were aspirational choosers, such as Neel, were thus

¹²² Later in the interview it was confirmed that the Neel's elder daughter was 7 years old.

¹²³ This interview ultimately became a joint interview with Neel's wife.

facilitated by mothers who bore the day-to-day responsibility for attempting to realise such aspirations in practice.

Indeed, in some households, mothers indicated that their husbands had specifically delegated the decision over children's schooling to them as part of their oversight of domestic activities. For example, Simran, a mother in Location B, told me that her husband left all schooling decisions up to her, including the decision to send their children to a private school, if the children were educated 'well'. Thus, while Simran described her family as 'conservative', veiling her face when outside of the family home and commenting that she was not allowed to undertake any paid employment ('I have to be at home because my in-laws are very strict'), her children's schooling offered a realm in which she could exercise some autonomy over decision-making by being framed as part of her 'duties' as a mother, echoing the findings of Mandal & Ete (2010), who identify children's education as associated with a broad sense of 'child care' and thus 'essentially a female activity' (p. 82) in the Indian context. However, while Simran indicated that her husband agreed with the choices she had made to date and was detached from the specifics of everyday choice work, it was clear that he had a significant role to play in confirming choices, as has been shown to be the case in studies of parents' involvement in schools in other national contexts (e.g. Reay, 1998).

The significance of the father as an authority figure within households also emerged more explicitly in other interviews, again across case sites. For example, despite Murthi's avowal that decisions were taken jointly between him and his wife, further questioning seemed to suggest that gender hierarchies within the home were persistent in shaping decision-making:

[RA: Brother, she [Eleanor] is asking who takes decisions regarding your children's education. Is it your wife, you or both of you together?]

Both of us.

[...]

[RA: Has it happened that there has been a difference of opinion between your wife and you? Like she says she doesn't want the children to study and you say something directly opposite...?]

No, she will agree with whatever I say.

[RA: You mean she agrees with all decisions you take?]

Yes, she does.

(Murthi, father; Location B; private aided school)

In interpreting parental accounts of decision-making authority, it is important to recognise researcher positionality and the influence of this upon the research process; as an educated woman, and a foreigner, my identity may have influenced some participants to stress equality in decision-making between parents because they might have felt I would have perceived this positively. However, this observation, and the above extract from Murthi's interview, should not be interpreted as overriding evidence that fathers were indeed the 'ultimate' household decision makers in households, as my NGO contacts had initially advised (p. 125). But, at the same time, it is also important to recognise the enduring significance of gendered power relations in shaping social norms surrounding decision-making within households and women's participation in public life (Connell, 1987).

The two examples from Simran and Murthi's households illustrate the dilemma that faced many mothers across all case sites, whereby children's education represented possibilities for some to assert a form of maternal authority, but where traditional gender hierarchies continued to frame such possibilities in significant ways. Indeed, while for some mothers it was apparent that schooling decisions were a space for asserting a form of private empowerment within the domestic sphere, the place where Connell (1987) suggests gender norms may be challenged and where social change is likely to be fostered, such opportunities were not equally distributed

between mothers. Indeed, Sharma (2008) points to the challenges that ‘the family’ as a social structure poses for feminist activism: ‘in practice, the family ideology has been among the hardest to subvert given its multiple sources of support and power’ (p. 173). As I demonstrate throughout the remainder of this chapter, choice-making for children’s education offers a window into the operation of everyday household power relations, including how the family structure may work to maintain the gender order, and how these may be resisted and accommodated by mothers themselves. At the same time, the findings also illuminate both mothers’ public-facing choice work through the adoption of consumer behaviours and the more ‘backstage’ advocacy that underlay decision-making in other households.

Building on these observations and extending the concept of motherwork as put forward by Collins (1994) to focus on the advocacy work that mothers undertook for their children’s education concerning educational decision-making and the significance of this work in terms of survival, identity and power, I turn now to focus on what mothers identified as the value of education for their children, thereby shedding light on important aspects of decision-making processes that are obscured by rational choice theory perspectives. In doing so, I focus primarily on aspirational and minimally engaged choosers, given the small number of disengaged choosers (see p. 211) and the similarly small number of mothers amongst community choosers in the data set.¹²⁴

8.3.1 Ensuring children’s futures: the value of education

In accordance with the significance of ensuring children’s survival within what Collins’ (1994) conceptualises as motherwork, most mothers interviewed for the current study stressed what they saw as the importance of education to secure their children’s futures, often in direct contrast to what mothers referred to as their own

¹²⁴ Across the data set, only one of the nine interviewees identified as a community chooser was a woman (see Appendix M). Given the modest size of this research study and the non-random nature of participant recruitment, I do not want to over-interpret the significance of this gender split. However, the importance of community affiliations for fathers and mothers respectively may prove to be a fruitful area for future research.

lack of education and the limiting effects of this within their own lives. Building on the identified significance of children's education in Chapter 7, across all case sites, both minimally engaged and aspirational choosers associated education with financial independence, respect, and greater life opportunities. For example:

I have given them an education so that they are not dependent on anyone if there comes a time of difficulty.
(Adena, mother; Location C, unaided private and government schools)

They won't have to rely on anyone. They will work because they are educated; they will have a job and can earn.
(Harini, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Thus, education as a means for securing children's futures was a key driver behind some mothers' motherwork with respect to their children's schooling both within the home and in engaging with schools more directly. As Collins (1994) notes, children's physical and psychological survival is not something that low income mothers from marginalised communities can take for granted. Specific acts of motherwork for children's education, including that surrounding choice-making, should thus not be understood as representing a generalised concern for children's wellbeing, but a high-stakes activity, recognised as carrying significant consequences whether resulting in failure or success.

One mother, Nimi, elaborated on the connection between education and life chances in her reflections concerning what she saw as the value of education for girls and specifically the rationale for sending her daughter to a fee-paying private school. Indeed, as Nimi explained, she had been pulled out of school in Class X to take care of her family when her mother fell ill, a source of considerable regret to her, and which she related to her own lack of agency within her home.

The thing is that a girl is often abused in her marital home but if she is educated, she won't be. If she is educated, even she can work and earn. Otherwise, we have to listen from our husbands that we are good for nothing [...] If we had been educated, then we would have answered our husbands back. Otherwise, we really cannot answer them back because they know we are dependent on them.

(Nimi, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Education is thus framed as an essential component of women's empowerment, by relating education to opportunities to enter the paid labour market and a subsequent shifting in domestic power relations. In addition, Nimi's account is also significant in drawing attention to the issue of mothers' own education and the constraints that mothers may face when negotiating decisions in the domestic sphere, issues that I return to later in this chapter. While data is limited, this example also draws attention to the significance of personal biography in shaping parents' engagement with their children's schooling and specific educational aspirations, as previously identified in Chapter 7.

8.3.2 School choice and maternal identity

While most interviewees across case sites indicated that choices were taken jointly between parents, some fathers were described by mothers as taking little direct interest in their children's education or being actively opposed to children enrolling or continuing in school, as I detail later in this chapter. However, a small number of mothers in Location B characterised themselves in relatively forceful terms as taking on key decision-making responsibilities. For example:

Only I and my mother take such decisions [about the children's education]. Because my husband is not at all concerned if the kids are studying or not; he has not visited their schools even once till now. It's only me who has taken steps towards educating them.

(Parmita, mother; Location B, government schools)

In this extract, while her husband is described as never having visited his children's schools, Parmita has made a conscious effort ('taken steps') to ensuring that her children are enrolled in school, implying a greater concern and care for her children

than her husband. Such accounts, in which some mothers characterised themselves as 'the labourers of school choice' (Reay & Ball, 1998, p. 443), taking on the responsibility for the day-to-day work of schooling and specific choice work (gathering information through friends and neighbours, negotiating school admissions and so on), draw attention to the significance of children's schooling for mothers as a way of demonstrating and asserting maternal authority and identity. Indeed, Collins (1994) argues that motherwork is concerned with the preservation of identity in the face of widespread societal discrimination. Building on this concept, I suggest that for a small proportion of the mothers that I interviewed for this study motherwork for children's education was bound up intimately with their own negotiation and struggle for maternal self-identity.

In particular, while most fathers who were interviewed also characterised themselves as actively engaged with their children's education, mothers' accounts of choice processes tended to draw on the language of care in ways that were not evident in fathers' accounts. In a striking example from an interview with one mother in Location B, Minakshi draws upon traditional images of motherhood in the form of pregnancy and 'caring' to assert her decision-making authority and to support her 'rights' within her home over her child and his schooling:

Me, I decided [which school my son would go to]. Carrying a child is my area. I carried my child, so I have more right over my child than my husband. Only a mother can care about a child like this, so women should take the decision.

(Minakshi, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

In part, such accounts add nuance to the conceptualisation of aspirational choosers by drawing attention to the significance of parental identity to parents' engagement with their children's schooling. However, constructions of maternal identity and the interplay between this and children's education took different forms. For example, Garima's love marriage to a man of a lower caste and her subsequent estrangement from her own family had informed her perspective on her son's education and the choice of a more expensive private school than was typical of other households in the area. In the following extract, Garima connects her choice of private schooling

for her son with the 'social drop' she experienced as a result of her marriage, illuminating her perception of the social value of education and the entanglement of choice-making with personal biography, class and caste:

I was interested in his education from the beginning. I wanted everything for him even things which I did not have. I had a love marriage, but I want my son to take my name forward. Everyone should think of me when they speak of my son. If he does something good in life, then he will be keeping my name.

(Garima, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Thus, aspirations for her son's future formed a key aspect of Garima's motherwork on her son's behalf, not least the choice to send him to a higher fee private school. However, the significance of his education for her own self-identity is equally apparent, helping to illuminate her identity as an aspirational chooser with respect to her son's education. In this way, it was notable that most mothers who were particularly assertive as to their maternal authority specifically related 'maternal care' to the decision to send children to unaided private schools.

While Garima did not connect her paid employment to her decision-making authority directly, another mother in the local area, Sanjana, was more explicit in emphasising how her paid work outside the home increased her decision-making power over schooling decisions:

My husband wanted to send him [her son] to a government school, but I refused. I said I know another child in this area who is going to a private school. I see him going to the private school and he is doing well, so I decided that he should go to a private school. I said, 'I earn money as well I can also decide'.

(Sanjana, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Sanjana's affirmation of her earning power and direct rebuttal of her husband's choice of school also revealed a key facet of the emotional processes underlying schooling decision-making. This was manifested in the pride that Sanjana took in contributing financially to send her son to a private school which was apparent as she shared this anecdote. Elsewhere in the interview, Sanjana also explained that

she had more freedom to go out to work in Delhi than she had in the village where she had grown up, a view echoed by some of the women interviewed by Vaid (2017), who characterise Delhi as a city that has ‘normalised’ working women (p. 363). However, negotiating the urban, public space and maternal agency was not straightforward for women across case sites, an issue that I return to later in this chapter.

It is important to recognise that not all mothers interviewed were as explicit as Garima, Minakshi, Sanjana and Parmita in asserting their maternal authority over their children’s schooling, which in the case of the former three also entailed the decision to access fee-paying private schooling. While the data is limited, and it is difficult to ascribe reasons for particular household dynamics, these four mothers were all residents of Location B, potentially indicating more relaxed gender hierarchies in this locality than in the other two case sites. The reasons for this are unclear from the data but may reflect the slightly higher proportion of educated mothers in this locality. At the same time, all four mothers were also in paid employment, which, as Sanjana herself asserted, may have given them greater ‘voice’ over domestic matters; it is also possible that greater ‘exposure’ to life outside of the immediate locality may have given these women a different perspective on their own domestic arrangements, a point I expand on later in this chapter. However, it is also perhaps significant that Garima, Minakshi and Sanjana were mothers of only sons, potentially increasing the domestic ‘stake’ over their sons’ futures and thus intensifying their desire to assert their authority over decision-making as aspirational choosers.¹²⁵ At the same time, it is also important to recognise that mothers across other localities described a degree of resistance within choice processes that may have been less overtly stated within the context of our interview, but that should be understood as equally significant as acts of motherwork for their children and in the renegotiation of power relations in the domestic sphere.

¹²⁵ Only one other mother, Ridika (Location B) was identified as the mother of an only son; she was not working outside of the family home. She reported that decisions were made jointly between her and her husband, and, while she did not assert singular authority over his education, was certainly deeply involved and invested in her son’s schooling.

8.3.3 Mothers' advocacy: strategies of resistance

The relationship between caste and the sexual division labour has been shown to play a significant role in shaping cultural expectations of women's behaviour. Indeed, Seymour (1995), building on Liddle & Joshi (1986), argues that gender and caste hierarchies are 'inextricably intertwined in India' (p. 73). In general terms, the keeping of women within the home is connected to rules surrounding purity and pollution amongst high-ranking Hindu caste groups, as Chen (1995) identifies: 'the more secluded the woman the higher her household's status or prestige' (p. 46). This appraisal is echoed by Fuller & Narasimhan (2013), who point out that, higher caste women can be constrained by 'Brahmanical norms' (p. 54), whilst seclusion practices tend to be more relaxed amongst lower caste women, who are often required to work outside the home to sustain the financial wellbeing of the household.¹²⁶ Data gathered for the current study revealed examples of mothers resisting traditional gender-caste ideologies of conduct in their motherwork. For example, one mother who identified herself as Brahmin, mentioned that she was working as a cook in Delhi without the knowledge of her in-laws:

A lot of times the family doesn't allow you to work, I mean your in-laws do not allow you to work. Women do not work in our caste [...] They don't know I am working here [in Delhi] and I do this for my children.

(Samali, mother; Location B, government school)

This example illustrates both how traditional caste-gender dynamics shape expectations of women's behaviour and freedom of movement, and how this may be resisted by some mothers, driven perhaps in part, as Samali suggested, by economic imperatives connected to paying for children's education. The reinforcement and apparent policing of the sexual division of labour and cultural

¹²⁶ Although, Mukhopadhyay & Seymour (1994) suggest that some higher caste women 'appear to be challenging traditional patrifocal structures and ideology' (p. 4), which they ascribe to relative gains educationally amongst this group. By contrast, Bordia Das (2005) points to a trend towards seclusion amongst lower ranking caste groups: 'as lower castes seek to emulate upper caste and class values, they too tend to keep their women at home' (p. 174), an observation echoed by Dreze & Sen (2004).

expectations of women's behaviour within the family unit is also apparent in this example (Connell, 1987), further illuminating how socio-cultural restrictions may impact upon mothers' engagement with their children's education.

In a small number of cases in both Location A and Location C, mothers indicated that their husbands or members of their extended family were opposed to some or all of their children attending or continuing school. In Saroj's family, for example, her husband felt that their sons should be working and earning money rather than continuing their schooling, in contrast to her own belief:

My husband is saying that the boys should be working, but I am pushing that this boy [oldest son] is educated. If he is willing, I will try my best to send him to College.

(Saroj, mother; Location C, government schools)

Saroj's motherwork on behalf of her children, exemplified by her 'pushing' for her older son to stay in school, illustrates her ongoing commitment to her children's education and belief that it will be valuable in their lives, a sentiment that she also expressed with regard to her daughters and a desire for them to complete 'at least [Class] Xth', again in the face of some opposition from her husband. In contrast to what appear to be assumptions of unified preferences within the pro-school choice literature, the conflict between Saroj and her husband over her children's schooling also illustrates how choices may be contested within families, with eventual outcomes a compromise between different perspectives and the subject of ongoing domestic negotiation. Such examples also reveal the choice work within families that apparently minimally engaged mothers undertook, illuminating that such work may be less overt than that pursued by aspirational choosers within education markets, but which be no less significant in securing educational access.

In Location A, mothers' accounts of motherwork on their daughters' behalf also emphasised the 'backstage' advocacy that mothers undertook as opposed to more direct challenges over decision-making authority. For example, in a joint interview with one mother, Rabia, and her eldest daughter, Laila, in Location A, Rabia spoke about her determination to ensure that her four daughters attended school past lower primary. From what she described as a traditional Muslim background,

Rabia's extended family, who did not live in Delhi, opposed this, in particular her brothers-in-law. However, Laila explained how her mother had persuaded her husband to stand up to his family on this issue, despite his initial reluctance. This had ultimately been a successful negotiation; Laila described how other extended family members had now been encouraged to send their daughters to school because 'they saw how well we were doing'.¹²⁷ While, as I noted in Chapter 7 (see p. 241), Rabia's son was still prioritised in terms of paying for private schooling, Rabia's motherwork for her daughters' education adds greater nuance to the picture of how mothers engage in what may still be important choice work within households.

Similarly, another mother in Location A, Fara, described how her husband was initially opposed to girls being educated, or indeed having much freedom of movement outside of the family home, and how her preference for her daughter to go to school was negotiated:

[RA: In your house, regarding these things, who makes the decisions? Meaning do you and your husband together decide? Or is it solely you who..?]

Should I tell you the truth? Mostly, I and he think on the same lines. Otherwise, for instance, my husband does not like girls to step out of their houses, or study. In such cases, we try to make them understand that things are changing. This is the day's demand. Today if the girls do not succeed, society would not see transformation. Right? God forbid, if something awkward happens to them tomorrow, they at least would be able to make a living if they are educated. Then our husbands understood and agreed to send the girls to schools for further studies.

(Fara, mother; Location A, government schools)

Fara's account of how she sought to advocate for her daughter to remain in school resonates with Kabeer's (1999) depiction of the strategic caution that some women may adopt when renegotiating power relations through what Fara characterises as a collective approach to influencing the views of her husband and other men in her

¹²⁷ This information was only revealed after the tape recorder had been turned off and perhaps when sufficient trust had been established between us. While the tape recorder was not switched on during this exchange, I continued to take notes and clarified with Rabia and Laila that they were happy for our conversation to be included as part of the 'main' interview.

extended family. While the evidence here is limited, this illuminates the significance of motherwork as something that may not just be done for one's own children, but also as a solidarity activity between women aimed at challenging established social norms (Connell, 1987). At the same time, in accordance with Collins' (1994) conception of motherwork, which emphasises that such work may be both collective and political in nature, the perceived significance of girls' education for societal transformation is referenced explicitly in Fara's account. However, how this collective notion of motherwork can be reconciled with the notion of education as a private good and the encouragement for parents to adopt consumer mode of engagement with children's schooling, as explicated in Chapter 3, is unclear. The influence of the extended family on decision-making, both as a source of support and as a conservative force that needs to be negotiated within choice processes, and the differences between parents' levels of engagement in their children's education, are also equally apparent.

Indeed, while Fara characterised her motherwork as a success, children's education was found to be an ongoing issue of domestic conflict within some households. In the following extract, Ranjita describes both her determination to ensure a 'proper' education for her children, which in this case involved migrating from rural Rajasthan to Delhi to seek a better quality of schooling, and the arguments that this resulted in between herself and her husband:

[RA: Since when you are living in Delhi?]

I have been here for one year. I moved here so that children could get a proper education. Their father is not literate. He hardly bothers about his children's education [...] The children were not learning there [in the village] and we had quarrels over it. I wanted their education in Delhi [...] We fight forever about this.

(Ranjita, mother; Location A, not in school)

The significance of children's education is revealed in Ranjita's continued motherwork on her children's behalf in the form of advocating for the family to move to Delhi, for her children to attend school, and paying for her children to attend private tuitions. However, the personal sacrifices that such motherwork can entail

is equally apparent in terms of familial harmony and direct threats to women's safety when traditional hierarchies may be challenged in this way (Kabeer, 1999). Thus, it is important to recognise the burden that motherwork may entail, particularly in a market context whereby choice is framed increasingly as necessary and where structural inequalities may constrain choice-making in significant ways, as I expand on in the following sub-section.

8.3.4 Constraints to motherwork

As the analysis in this chapter has demonstrated, choice-work as motherwork was significant for some mothers who were interviewed as part of the current study, both in terms of efforts for securing children's futures and in their own negotiation of maternal authority. However, as Sharma (2008) points out, the collectivisation of women as 'women' fails to take adequate account of subjectivities that are 'a complex, contextual, and changing amalgam of the various social relations in which they move [that may] exert antagonistic pressures and lead to competing claims' (p. 172). Thus, the ways in which power relations are articulated in particular contexts draw attention to the enabling and constraining factors that shape mothers' experiences and subjectivities within individual families.

Subhaiya & Vanneman (2016) note that, while the relationship between education and women's empowerment is complex, women with more education may have more decision-making power within the home: 'Education also confers social status so that educated women can use their enhanced status to strengthen their bargaining position within the household' (p. 7). While this kind of decision-making power was relatively unusual across case sites, indeed found in only four of the 58 households,¹²⁸ the higher education of the mother than the father was identified explicitly by interviewees as a reason for egalitarian decision-making within these families, as one father, Ravi, describes:

¹²⁸ Three in Location B and one in Location C.

[RA: She [Eleanor] wants to know who takes decisions regarding your children's education in your family. Is it you, your wife or both of you together?]

We decide together. She has passed Class XII and I am not even educated. When it comes to their school projects or drawings, I download it from the internet for them, but we...decisions about their education are taken together.

(Ravi, father; Location B, private aided school)

Given that national level data indicates that India is close to gender parity in primary school enrolment, the next generation may see an associated enhanced decision-making role for women within households. However, such data also draw attention to the consequences of a relative lack of education for mothers, namely that they may be more at risk of being excluded from decision-making processes, a point that I develop further in Chapter 9 in relation to the relationship between parents and schools.

Indeed, what seemed to be characterised by fathers as a more detached engagement by some mothers with choice work could have been a consequence of the mismatch between their habitus and the social field of schools, as shaped by the constraining effects of the wider gender order, and an associated self-exclusion. For example:

[RA: [Eleanor] is asking that when it comes to children's education, how do you take those decisions? Do you make those decisions on your own, or is it your wife who makes it, or the two of you decide together?]

My wife is illiterate, so she tells me to educate him as much as I can.

(Sachin, father; Location A, selective government school)

Sachin was one of three fathers across the data set who asserted that decisions were taken by them alone, with two other fathers (Kayaan and Krishnan, Location B) similarly asserting that their more advanced levels of education compared to their wives lay behind this dynamic. In all cases, mothers were characterised as supportive, but separate from the specifics of choice-making and choice work. However, given

that I was not able to interview the mothers in these households, it is not clear whether they were in fact engaged in more subtle forms of motherwork than may be captured or indeed recognised in their husbands' accounts.

It was notable that some mothers in Location A in particular, while expressing commitment to their children's education, appeared to be somewhat detached from the specificities of choice and children's schooling, leading me to categorise them as minimally engaged choosers. Shweta, for example, was not sure as to the fees at her son's private school, which was located some distance from the basti, and in her account seemed disconnected from the choice process itself. Indeed, noting that decisions were taken jointly, it appeared that Shweta's husband was the primary decision-maker and indeed the labourer of school choice within their household:

His [her son's] father works there [i.e. in that area], so he came to know about it.

(Shweta, mother; Location A, unaided private school)

Thus, as emerged from across the interview, it was Shweta's husband who had visited the school prior to admission, who took their son to and from school, and who visited for PTA meetings. The decision to send their son to an unaided private school also appeared to be driven by Shweta's husband. Similarly, while Janvi told me that she hoped that her son would enrol at a private school within 'the next two or three years', she appeared to be vague about the specifics of this decision:

I don't know where it is located but we were thinking of admitting them to this school because it is a good school [...] my husband would know [where it is], you can talk to him.

(Janvi, mother; Location A, government school)

Both Janvi and Shweta described themselves as housewives, which may have meant that they travelled less frequently outside of the immediate local area than those who were engaged in paid work. Given that Location A had relatively few schools in the vicinity, mothers' knowledge of the wider education market and information gathering efforts were thus likely to have been more limited than in Locations B and C, given restrictions of mobility guided by traditional gender norms of behaviour

(Sharma, 2008). In this way, while both Shweta and Janvi noted that decisions were taken jointly between them and their husbands, their knowledge of alternative schooling options was partial, in turn limiting their ability to engage more directly in choice work. Opportunities for empowerment for mothers were thus highly dependent on the interplay between locality, paid employment and level of education that may articulate differently across a single urban centre such as Delhi.

At the same time, in line with Desai & Temsah (2014), who identify little difference in women's household decision-making power between Muslim and Hindu households, comparison between households indicates no obvious differences in motherwork practices according to religious identity. However, the evidence in this respect is limited and mothers' direct engagement with schools may be more restricted amongst this group than captured by the current study. The one school principal I interviewed in Location C, for example, commented that she felt that, because she was a woman, Muslim mothers may have been freer to visit the school to speak with her than they would have been if she had been male, indicating her perception that women's participation in public life – and so in children's schooling - may be constrained by the intersections between religious identity and gender ideologies of conduct.

8.3.5 The burden of motherhood: motherwork as 'good' mothering

Earlier in this chapter, I identified the significance of children's education for mothers in relation to survival and future self-reliance, which, as Collins (1994) points out, form a key aspect of motherwork. However, while drawing attention to the transformative qualities of motherwork in some contexts, it is also important to recognise the restrictive nature of maternal identity that such conceptualisations also imply.

The notion of the self-sacrificing mother, entirely dedicated to her children, conforms to traditional images of mothers as represented in popular culture (Connell, 2009); for example, mothers labouring in low paying jobs to be able to afford to educate their sons is a familiar depiction from traditional Bollywood cinema (Krishnaraj, 2010, p. 1). Thus, while some mothers capitalised on this traditional

image of sacrificial motherhood to assert their maternal authority over children, it is also important to recognise the demands on mothers that such notions of maternal identity also imply.

Building on empirical accounts of education amongst India's middle classes, Nambissan (2010) argues that expectations of mothering within middle-class families have shifted in recent years in response to changing social class structures, globalisation, and the associated pressures of economic competition: 'The educated mother [...] is increasingly becoming critical for the "appropriate parenting" that is being seen as necessary for children's school success' (p. 293). In particular, intensive mothering practices, such as giving tuitions, homework help and activities associated with choice work, have garnered new significance as focused strategies for gaining access to English-medium, private schools (Donner, 2005; Lukose, 2010; see Chapter 3).

Indeed, the significance of girls' education was frequently conceptualised in relation to expectations of 'good' mothering across all study sites, which centred around the 'value-added' that an educated mother would bring to a household for children's education and wellbeing. For example:

If they are educated enough, like basic maths and these things, it will be useful and they will be responsible and be able to teach their children.

(Saroj, mother; Location C, government schools)

Thus, formal education is related to maternal responsibility and, as in several other interviews across case sites, with the notion of mother as 'home tutor'. The importance of the educated mother also connects to what Drury (1993) identifies as the 'educational dowry' of brides (p. 169), whereby the wider family unit accumulates cultural capital through selecting a daughter-in-law as a resource for children's schooling success (see also Donner, 2005; Nambissan, 2010). For example, Ganika ascribed the attractiveness of educated girls on the marriage market to their possible earning potential, a safety net if the family fell on hard times:

It is often said that if the girl is educated, if the boy ceases to earn then the girl would be able to sustain the life of the family.

(Ganika, mother; Location A, government schools)

The use of motherwork to 'sustain' the family thus formed at least part of the rationale for accessing schooling for daughters.

At the same time, implicit critiques of the uneducated mother were also occasionally identifiable in interview data:

My wife is illiterate. But when my daughters would have kids, they would be in a position to teach and guide them because they are studying and are educated.

(Krishnan, father; Location B, private aided school)

In the above extract, there is an association between illiteracy and a lack of ability to 'guide' children appropriately in their learning; there is also an implication that a lack of guidance may extend beyond specific tutoring help to a more holistic conception of parental support. Thus, the idealised mother is an educated mother, whose primary objective centres around children's educational success, with girls' education subsumed within the wider cultural conceptualisation of motherhood and 'appropriate' maternal practice:

If a girl gets educated, then the whole family can study in the house.

(Arav, father; Location B, government and unaided private schools)

Arav's viewpoint reflects a familiar conceptualisation of the relationship between women, education and development, which frames girls' education as an essential lever for economic growth and intergenerational educational gain. However, as Unterhalter (2005) observes, such expectations centre on traditional gender norms that focus on women as mothers rather than framing education as of essential benefit to women and girls themselves. Thus, as Sharma (2008) argues, 'women, as mothers, are important only as secondary players in the development of children' (p. 209). Building on the findings presented in Chapter 7, such accounts also illuminate differential educational aspirations for girls and boys, and in this way the differential application of choice criteria, whereby relatively basic education and the protection

of girls' sexual modesty are prioritised above specific academic aspirations in view of anticipated post-schooling trajectories. The preparation of girls for motherhood is thus of prime importance.

Returning to the notion of motherwork, by connecting gender discourses surrounding girls' education and maternal practice it also becomes possible to appreciate that, while opportunities for motherwork via choice may indicate possibilities for greater agency by some mothers within the domestic sphere, there is also the danger that it represents a new articulation of the existing gender order by reinforcing the idea that mothers' labour centres primarily on children (Connell, 1987). In this way, the sacrificial quality of motherwork is not only expected, but internalised and celebrated by mothers themselves as a fundamental part of maternal identity. Furthermore, the social expectation that mothers' work should focus on the project of children's educational success for the purposes of individual socio-economic advantage via accessing unaided private schooling and tuitions may undermine the concept of motherwork as the collective and empowering practice that Collins (1994) and later Cooper (2009) envisage. Thus, in a market context where notions of 'participation' via choice are a discernable trend within policy discourses (see Chapter 2), it is important to consider the demands on mothers that the increasing necessity of choice imply and how, while choice may offer opportunities for some mothers, it may also add to the burden of motherhood rather than its transformation.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the dynamics of decision-making within families in an attempt to add nuance to the broad categories of parent chooser identified in Chapter 7. The analysis demonstrates that important motherwork concerning securing access to education was still taking place within the minimally engaged group, while 'choice' seemed to provide some mothers with opportunities for asserting maternal authority, helping to explain their decision-making for their children's education as aspirational choosers.

In this way, the analysis has shown how mothers play an important role in shaping and working to realise aspirations for children's education, indicating aspects of choice processes that rational choice theory cannot account for. In particular, that choice is not made by a single 'rational chooser' but negotiated within a broader household and extended family context, reinforcing the socially situated nature of the choice process. Differences between case sites also indicate how constraints to motherwork and choice may manifest differently according to locality, with some mothers more able to engage in active choice work outside the home.

Thus, in contrast to a rational choice approach, the analysis presented in this chapter has used the concept of motherwork, which has not previously been applied to settings within the Global South, to illuminate the work that mothers do for their children's education, its significance for their own maternal identity construction, and its mediation through locally situated socio-cultural dynamics and gender hierarchies. The analysis suggests that an emphasis on the opportunities for maternal empowerment via choice need to be tempered by the recognition of the burden that such motherwork may also entail, as well as the constraints that mothers have to negotiate in the realisation of choice preferences that are revealed through comparisons between mothers across case sites. In Chapter 9, I build on this analysis to focus on the strategic work that parents undertook in attempts to realise choice preferences within education markets and how they made sense of the various constraints they encountered.

CHAPTER 9

CONSTRAINED CHOICES

Barriers, mitigating strategies and choice outcomes

9.1 Introduction

For most parents, choice preferences are only part of the story with respect to schooling decisions and in this, the final empirical, chapter of the thesis I analyse how parents made sense of the various constraints they encountered in the choice landscape. In doing so, I build on the analysis presented in Chapter 8 of (some) mothers' strategic engagement with children's schooling and the constraints that shaped their motherwork. As in the previous empirical chapters, I focus on findings and key analytic themes that cut across the localities, but, reflecting the nested approach in the research design, I also identify how these sometimes manifested differently across case sites due to locational and school-specific variations.

As summarised in Chapter 3, proponents of a marketised approach to education delivery argue that the threat of consumer exit will encourage providers to be more responsive to parents, who may also apply pressure through exercising 'voice' to the same effect (Tooley, 1995; see section 3.2.2). Thus, consumer sovereignty is anticipated to shape the nature of provision in ways that match with consumer preferences (Dixon, 2004), in this way ensuring parental 'participation' via choice as outlined in Chapter 2. However, in this chapter I show that parents' ability to access schooling, or to exercise either 'exit' or 'voice' in response to school quality failings, is often heavily constrained by factors beyond their control. Moreover, challenging the representation of parents who do not exercise voice or exit as 'inert clients' (Hirschman, 1970), I demonstrate that parents were not unconscious of quality failings, but moderated their expectations and adopted other mitigating

strategies in view of perceived barriers to accessing quality education. In doing so, and in contrast to rational choice assumptions, I argue that Bourdieu's theory of practice provides a useful framework for interpreting parents' choice-making within the study settings.

I begin the chapter by considering how parents gathered information about schools, showing that parents were differently advantaged in their ability both to gather information about schools and to assess children's learning, but that all faced significant difficulties in this regard (section 9.2). I then identify three key barriers facing parents in education markets - affordability, limited school places, and bureaucracy - and explain how these barriers served to shape choice behaviour within the contexts of the case sites (section 9.3). I present an analysis of how some parents sought to overcome such constraints by leveraging available resources (section 9.4), before examining parents' responses to perceived quality failures and the constraints on both voice and exit in the study settings (section 9.5).

9.2 Gathering information in the market

The absence of 'cold' knowledge (Ball & Vincent, 1998) in the study contexts, such as league tables, summative assessment data, or school inspection data, meant that parents were reliant largely on 'hot' knowledge to inform their quality judgements. However, as I examine in this section, parents were differently advantaged in their ability to gather and assess such information based on their different social and cultural capitals.

While some aspirational choosers described having visited their child's school prior to enrolment, visiting different schools in a comparative way during choice processes was not common practice, as previous studies of private schooling in India have also found (Srivastava, 2008). In Chapter 7, I also identified the importance of rumour and gossip in shaping parents' quality perceptions showing how informal social networks were the primary source of most parents' information about schools in each area. Indeed, most parents across all case sites described asking their

neighbours, relatives and in some cases employers for information and advice about schooling. For example:

When it comes to their education, I speak to my elder brother and a friend, [name redacted]. There are two or three more friends who I ask about good schools.

(Varshil, father; Location A, unaided private school)

Like Varshil, parents across case sites mentioned family members as trusted information sources regarding the local schooling market. Crucially, this centred on members of the family who had attended school themselves and were regarded as better informed for help and advice during choice processes. Leveraging social networks for information about schools was thus one strategy for information gathering. However, aspirational choosers, such as Varshil, were more likely to have educated family members or to be working in environments where colleagues or employers were educated (see section 7.2.1, pp. 213-214) and thus were better positioned to tap into such social capital.

At the same time, while ‘hot’ knowledge (Ball & Vincent, 1998) from social contacts provided insights that participants found helpful, reliance on word-of-mouth networks also led to incomplete knowledge of the choice landscape; it was sometimes apparent across all choice categories and in all localities that parents were unaware of large schools in each local area that were popular with other families. However, minimally engaged choosers were more likely to have ‘information gaps’ in their knowledge of the market. For example, referring to an all-boys secondary school in Location A, one of the only non-selective options in the locality, one mother indicated that, while she was intending to send her two sons to the school after Class V, she was unsure about the school’s quality:

I haven’t visited there and I haven’t heard [anything] about it. No children from this street are going there.

(Parul, mother; Location A, government school)

Thus, while not unconscious of education quality, noting the importance of teachers ‘showing concern’ for children’s education and similarly engaged in the everyday

motherwork surrounding her children's schooling and tuitions, Parul lacked the necessary social capital to acquire information about the school, or the 'know how' (cultural capital) to seek out this information in other ways, such as visiting the school directly. Parents, and particularly mothers as previously identified in Chapter 8, were thus differently advantaged in their ability to gather school information in education markets. Assessing quality also proved challenging, as evidenced through the application of inadequate proxies for learning outcomes (see Chapter 7).

9.2.1 Assessing learning

The use of quality proxies is to be anticipated in the absence of assessment data and given that learning is generally difficult to capture in the short term. However, judging children's learning was particularly difficult for parents with little or no formal education themselves, which comprised most parents across all case sites. Strategies that parents described, including aspirational choosers such as Neel, included asking their children to read aloud, not necessarily knowing themselves what they were asking their children to decode:

If there is something written in front of them they should say that this is what is written. Then I will have peace of mind that money is not being wasted [on their education]. Now if I ask her [oldest daughter] anything, she is not able to give me an answer; she is able to answer only with a lot of difficulty.

(Neel, father; Location C, government and unaided private schools)

Children responding quickly to questions without pausing or writing even if parents could not read themselves were common strategies for determining learning that some parents described. However, despite assertions that parents can make informed judgements on school quality (Tooley et al., 2007), the inadequacy of such approaches is clear for parents who lacked the very skills that they were attempting to assess in their children.

Other aspirational choosers, while having selected schools at least in part for academic reasons, described having a general sense that their child was not learning at the pace that they would like without a clear understanding of what this would

have entailed, sometimes only gaining insights when they moved their child to another school and were informed that, at least in the school's judgement, the child was behind in their learning:

But [when we went for admission] he did not know how to count [to 100], so the previous school wasn't good.

(Harini, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Other aspirational choosers who did have experience of formal education still did not necessarily express that they felt equipped to judge children's learning themselves, and described deferring to teachers as experts:

They [teachers] tell us how our daughter is doing in the school; we have done this theory, she knows this much now. They tell us how much course is remaining on their part and where we have to help her, how much time we should give to her. They tell us to give her an hour daily or half an hour. I mean, they completely guide us as to how we have to look after the child

(Varshil, father; Location A, unaided private school)

As already noted in Chapter 7, teachers keeping parents well informed was one aspect of what several parents discussed in terms of teacher quality. However, the framing of teachers as 'knowing better' – with the deference to teachers as guides and the differential power relationships this implies (Dreze & Sen, 2003) – may be one explanation for what researchers have identified as a lack of parent 'voice' in unaided private schools (Srivastava, 2008), an issue I return to in section 9.5.

Communication between aspirational choosers and teachers was not always straightforward. For example, Garima, who in her description of the value she placed on English-medium schooling for her son (see section 7.3.2) revealed a key barrier in her inability to communicate with teachers and to assess her son's progress:

Here in private schools, teachers interact with our children in English. They also speak in English with me and I try to do my best.

(Garima, mother of one son, age 8; unaided private school)

Garima could not speak English and so, while she was comparatively privileged within the context of the local community having attended school until Class XII and working in an administrative and thus higher status job than most other parents who were interviewed, was constrained in her ability to assess her son's learning and to exercise 'voice' within the context of her son's school. Aspirational choosers were thus not necessarily more able to assess children's learning effectively than their minimally engaged counterparts, although they made concerted attempts to do so.

Some parents who valued education but who had not necessarily prioritised quality in their decision-making (i.e. some minimally engaged and community choosers) noted that they simply were unable to judge the quality of their child's school until 'the results were in'. When asked about the quality of his older nephew's school, Nazir said that the family would reserve judgement until his exam results were received:

We would judge the school's quality after the results of his Board exams¹²⁹ are out [...] We can only judge our child; there is no provision so we can test the principal or the teachers of the school while students are made to sit for exams every six months or a year.

(Nazir, uncle; Location C, unaided private and government schools)

Similarly, Lalan suggested that quality judgements were essentially dependent on exam results and, as was common among minimally engaged choosers, expressed what seemed to be a degree of resigned ambivalence as to the outcome:

[RA: No, do you feel they are doing well in terms of education?]

He passed this year so education is good. But if he fails next year, then education will be poor. This is what it is.

(Lalan, mother; Location A, government school)

Thus, non-aspirational choosers were not necessarily quality unconscious or unconcerned with educational outcomes, but were somewhat detached from the specificities of assessing learning. Such accounts across all choosers and across all case sites further illustrate why educational inputs in the form of basic school

¹²⁹ National level, standardised assessments taken in Class X and Class XII.

facilities and proxies such as homework for assessing teaching and learning were referred to so commonly across all case sites and categories of parent chooser (see Table 7.1, p. 209). The barriers that all parents faced in realising quality aspirations are equally apparent. As I elaborate in the following section, such barriers also encompassed constraints in terms of school admission.

9.3 Access barriers: constraints to school admission

As already noted in Chapter 3, expressing a choice and gaining that choice are not one and the same. In this section, I focus on the key constraints that parents across case sites identified in terms of school access - affordability, limited school places and bureaucracy - and examine how parents interpreted and responded to these constraints. In doing so, I identify how parents were differentially advantaged in their ability to overcome these interrelated constraints, findings that I go on to examine in relation to parents' strategies for overcoming barriers to quality education.

9.3.1 Affordability

A common assertion made by many parents was that their ability to access quality schooling was reliant upon financial resources. Almost every parent who was interviewed referenced budget considerations as playing a significant role in shaping their decision-making. As one mother put it:

Everything depends on money, so we keep our budget accordingly.
(Babita, mother; Location B, government and private aided schools)

Indeed, the view that parents would choose schools primarily based upon spending power permeated the data. For example, a member of staff at an unrecognised private school in Location B cited the school's fee level as attractive to parents, whilst maintaining that parents would choose the most expensive school that they could afford:

If your pockets allow you to go for thousands, then you go for thousands.

(Manisha, school principal; Location B)

Indeed, most minimally engaged choosers identified their budget, or lack thereof, as a defining reason for their eventual schooling decisions, explaining that this was why they were not accessing what they perceived as a 'good' school:

Due to our problems, we can't afford to admit them into a good school. My earnings don't allow me.

[...]

[RA: Or was there some other reason as well?]

There is no [other] reason as such. We don't have a better budget.
(Arjun, father; Location B, private aided school)

Minimally engaged parents may thus have valued quality in a general sense, but simply felt that it was an unattainable goal in view of budgetary constraints, in some sense a willing to the inevitable (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54) by not engaging in choice at the earliest stage of the choice-process in simply opting for the school closest to the family home.

By contrast, aspirational choosers tended to have access to more financial resources either through both parents working, or one parent being in a comparatively stable job in the context of the locality (see Chapter 7, section 7.2.1). However, two households without access to such resources were explicit in their decision to access unaided private schooling in the early years only. As Neel describes, while their youngest child was enrolled in pre-primary classes at a local government school, the family were planning on sending her to a private school once the other two children had completed Class V:

After these two pass out [i.e. leave private school after Class V] our expenses will once again stop [reduce] [...] Once these two pass out I will put her into a private [school].

(Neel, father; Location C, unaided private and government schools)

In this way, all children in the family would get some private education, even if the family could not afford private schooling for all children for their whole school careers, a similar strategy adopted by another family (Arav) in Location B, and echoing research elsewhere in India identifying a similar trend of accessing private schooling only at the lower primary stage based on affordability constraints (James & Woodhead, 2014).

The lack of lower fee schools in Location A also meant that aspirational choosers had to expand their search area for an affordable school (see figure 6.1, p. 190). In one instance, this included a child living with a relative in another part of Delhi to enable her to attend a private school in that area, in effect another form of social capital that this family were able to tap into that might not have been available to more recent migrants to Delhi. As the father in this family explained, once the decision to access an English-medium private school had been taken, affordability was the single most determining factor in the school choice process:

They [current school] did not take any donation. They only took the fee and admission charge and the monthly fee was only Rs. 750 which we can afford.

(Varshil, father; Location A, unaided private school)

Furthermore, as Varshil suggests, initial payments for school access were a significant aspect of all parents' cost considerations. These included 'donations', technically illegal (see section 6.3), but cited by several parents across all case sites as common practice across unaided private schools, in addition to similarly illegal levies such as 'admission fees' and 'annual charges'. 'Hot' knowledge about school fees and donations was also found to circulate around communities:

I have heard that recently someone got his child admitted to that school [local higher fee school]. They ended up paying around [Rs.] 20,000 for the admission.

[RA: Donation?]

Yes. They want a year's deposit in advance. In case you want to withdraw your child from the school in that year, then as per their policy you will not be given the rest of the amount back. They say you are withdrawing at your own accord, so they won't return the money.
(Aishi, mother; Location B, unaided private and government schools)

While the payment of donations is difficult to verify, it was certainly a widespread perception that unaided private schools in each area were charging extremely high fees at the time of admission. As I discuss later in this chapter, this perception contributed to the sense of unattainability that surrounded what were seen as better quality schools, as equated directly with cost (see section 7.3, p. 219).

9.3.2 Competition for limited places

In addition to budget restrictions, a clear barrier to acquiring goods in any market setting, limited school places also meant that parents could not always realise specific preferences. In this respect, there appeared to be little difference between case sites despite differences in the number of schools between localities. Thus, more schools did not seem to equate to less competitive pressure on school admission, at least from parents' perspectives.

For some aspirational choosers, seeking school admission necessitated being trapped in a cycle of school admission 'lucky draws' for fee-free places at both unaided private and selective government schools, illuminating the distinction between expressing a choice and actually gaining that choice in practice. For example, Rajiv and Mishka described how they had been frustrated in their earlier attempts to enrol their son at a selective government school, compromising in the short term on an unaided private school outside the local area. However, aware that competition for places was likely to be further intensified after Class V, the family intended to apply for further 'lucky draws' in the next school year:

[RA: Why did you choose [private school] for your son? Why did you admit him there?]

Rajiv: Actually, we filled forms at two to three schools [identified elsewhere in the interview as different selective government schools in Delhi]. But our number did not turn up there.

[...]

Rajiv: We can't take the chance of sending him here till Class V, because then his number may not come in other schools. So, we are thinking of admitting him to some other school this year itself, in Class III.

[RA: Do you have any school in your mind, where you would like to admit him?]

Mishka: We will fill forms in two to three schools this time around.
(Rajiv and Mishka, father and mother; Location A, unaided private school)

The bureaucratic challenges involved in entering such 'lucky draws' or other admission procedures should not be underestimated; requirements such as a birth certificate, legal affidavits, and English language admission forms not only necessitated additional time and expense, but also some administrative 'know-how' (see section 6.3). However, not all parents were confident that the lottery process at all schools was a fair one, as Neel describes in relation to an unaided private school in Location C:

When I went they said both your children's names have been selected through the draw [for admission under the RtE Act 25% reservation], come tomorrow at 9 [am]. The next day I went but a little late. They wrote a note saying that your children's names have not come. These are the [selected] children's names, you can check it [the list]. The guard also changed his tune the next day [...] Someone must have surely bribed them to take our seats; we are poor so we couldn't do anything.

(Neel, father; Location C, government and unaided private schools)

For other, minimally engaged, choosers, more exclusive school options appeared to have been ruled out as 'impossible' based on hot knowledge about competition for school places acquired from their social contacts:

I wanted to admit them there [local private school], but that also did not work out.

[RA: Did you apply in [that school]? Or you didn't?]

No, I asked someone.¹³⁰ That person said that it would be difficult there. The seats there get filled a year in advance.

(Ananya, mother; Location B, government school)

As she described later in the interview, despite her children having been eligible for the RtE Act 25% reservation, Ananya had also decided against trying to seek admission for them through this mechanism. Thus, while aspirational choosers such as Neel persisted in attempts to try to secure access to what they perceived as better quality education despite stiff competition for places, minimally engaged choosers essentially ruled themselves out of attempting to engage in choice before the point of refusal.

The premium on school places also impacted aspirational choosers, where admissions processes were also described as competitive. For example, Garima's account both hints at the emotionally stressful nature of the admissions process, but also the general perception that both financial resources *and* social contacts were a requirement to gain admission to 'good' schools in the context of limited places:

This was not our first choice. I had visited [another high fee private school in a nearby area] at first, which is located in [name redacted]. But they refused admission. They wanted recommendations, [an] approach and other things too. We did not have any choice.

(Garima, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Even though Garima's son was attending a higher fee school in Location B, one which was highly desirable to many other parents in the area, the mismatch between her aspirations for her son's education and lack of social connections meant that, for

¹³⁰ Identified later in the interview as a neighbour.

Garima, the school still represented a significant compromise. This echoes Young's (2011) observation that 'even relatively privileged individuals will often say that they "have no choice" about doing or not doing certain things because of the way that they experience structural processes' (p. 56). Inequalities in education markets thus tended to be treated by parents as objective 'facts of nature' (ibid.) rather than the cumulative result of individual agency.

9.3.3 Bureaucracy and 'know how'

In line with what was a widespread perception that financial resources and social capital were key requirements for school admission, no parents described or showed awareness of more specific criteria for unaided school admission, including the Ganguly Commission criteria (see section 6.3). However, the bureaucratic systems that parents encountered were identified as barriers to school access. In answer to my question as to whether he was aware of the RtE Act 25% reservation, Krishnan, for example, identified what he perceived as the need for support from local officials when collecting paperwork for admission under such schemes and thus the difficulties in practice for families like his own:

For the other poor people [i.e. not from SC groups] who reside in jhuggis [JJs], they need to run behind lots of people, be it the MLA [Member of Legislative Assembly of Delhi] or some other influential person, for their signatures. Now, to run behind them one needs to take off from work for a week, ten days, fifteen days, which means a cut from wages. So that takes money.

(Krishnan, father; Location B, private aided school)

It is not clear whether Krishnan is referring to signatures required to indicate support for admissions in the form of brokerage, the 'recommendations' mentioned by other parents, or official signatures on documents attesting to income level. However, the work that was perceived as being required to gain access to high fee private schools, the perceived necessity of having some political nous within this process, and the financial implications for daily wage earners are apparent. The perceived impossibility of applying for such schemes may thus have contributed to parents

essentially ‘opting out’ of a more active engagement with choice. In this way, while I noted in Chapter 7 that community choosers such as Krishnan had specifically chosen schools as a practice of forging solidarities, possibly as a strategy of protection against discrimination, there is also a sense of a ‘will[ing] to the inevitable’ (Bourdieu, 1990a, p. 54) in Krishnan’s account. Barriers to access, while very real, were thus anticipated and incorporated into parents’ decision-making before the point of probable refusal.

The forms that parents were required to complete for school admission presented a particular challenge for parents who were not literate. Some of the higher fee private schools in Locations A and B, for example, managed their admissions online through portals that were exclusively in English and would have been inaccessible to parents who I interviewed. One father, an aspirational chooser in Location A, also showed me the forms that he was required to fill in for admission to a local mid fee private school, which were several pages long and in English. When I asked him how he would complete this, as he could not read or write in English, he said that he ‘would manage’; when I asked a mother in Location B a similar question she said that she knew a local man who was literate and usually helped her with form filling of this kind, for a fee. As well as such additional costs, it is easy to appreciate how such forms may have been intimidating for parents and acted as a form of unofficial admission screening.

Unequal power dynamics between schools and parents was also suggested by some aspirational choosers’ accounts of visiting schools when seeking admission, as Ritvik explains:

You take admission in four or five schools and then they release the wait list [but] we don’t get to know about it.

[RA: Did you speak to anyone when you went for admissions that you could ask about this?]

You don’t see a face! You just get the form and go [...] If you are willing to pay, then you will get admission.

(Ritvik, father; Location B, private aided and unaided schools)

The lack of communication and interaction with school representatives that Ritvik describes seems to be at odds with the consumer sovereignty model that Dixon (2004) and others suggest underpins the low fee private (LFP) sector. As several other parents also expressed, the belief that payment would 'smooth over' admissions processes is equally apparent.

In some cases, minimally engaged choosers' descriptions navigating the bureaucracy surrounding admissions illuminated other aspects of the unequal power relationships between parents and school authorities that were not confined to the private sector. For example, one mother described being denied a Transfer Certificate (TC) by her son's government school to send him to another government school a little over 1 km away:

[RA: Did they give the TC? Did they tell you why they could not give the TC?]

They said it falls on the main road and the child will not be able to cross the road. He might have an accident and that they would not be responsible for that. We told them that we would be responsible, that we would send him on a rickshaw, but they still did not give us the TC.
(Lalan, mother; Location A, government school)

Not only is the reason that Lalan reports he was given for the denial of the TC paternalistic in the sense that a school transfer was apparently denied based on road safety, but it also reveals the significance of bureaucratic systems that parents encountered in school spaces that could operate as barriers to choice in practice. Thus, Lalan, who had originally migrated to Delhi from Nepal and had no experience of formal education herself, was unable to secure her choice of school for her son because school authorities prevented him exiting his current school. Lalan's case suggests that it may be appropriate to recognise a sub-category of minimally engaged choosers as 'thwarted choosers', encompassing those who had perhaps attempted to engage in choice, but were no longer continuing to do so in the face of bureaucratic and other constraints.

Difficulties in negotiating the bureaucratic aspects of school admission had acted as a clear barrier for two other families in Location A, both of which were

relatively new migrants to Delhi, where all the children in the family were out of school. In particular, Ranjita told me that the local MCD school had told her to put her children in tuitions for a year before admitting them as they were 'behind in studies', which, if accurate, is illegal in denying the children their right to free education (see section 6.3). Ranjita was not aware of this and indeed was not unhappy with the school authorities, explaining that she was following this advice and would try again for admission the following year, illuminating how parents without the 'right' kind of cultural capital were disadvantaged by not knowing their legal rights within admission processes. In a slightly different case, the other parent in the data set not accessing any form of schooling, Prateek, also described being 'put off' from applying for admissions to the same MCD school because he did not have access to the required paperwork:

I was told that if you don't have any residence certificate it will be difficult for you [to admit your child].

(Prateek, father; Location A, not in school)

Significantly, Prateek had not visited the school in question to verify whether this would be a problem in admission and was certainly hesitant to do so in the future. In Bourdieusian terms, anxieties surrounding admission are illustrative of the mismatch that parents from lower income and marginalised groups may experience when their habitus encounters an unfamiliar field. Not knowing the 'rules of the game' may thus dissuade some parents from engaging with the school admissions process before what they may perceive will be an inevitable rejection. While the accuracy of reports such as Lalan's and Ranjita's are impossible to verify, the denial of school access also exemplifies how the odds were indeed stacked against lower income households in their attempts to realise their right to free education in the context of only very limited government regulation and oversight.

9.4 Resource leverage

As detailed in the previous section, parents faced several constraints in negotiating school access that were connected to their comparatively low levels of education, low incomes and lack of the kinds of social contacts that could facilitate school access. Indeed, it was apparent that several parents perceived that financial capital, social contacts and a degree of 'know how' were important when seeking access to desirable schools. However, although aware of such constraints, this did not mean that parents did not act strategically to try to overcome them in order to fulfil their aims for their children's education.

Two avenues that families utilised to try and overcome constraints to school access, or to educational success more generally, were paying for private tuitions and attempting to bypass financial barriers to school access through the RtE Act 25% reservation or other scholarship places. Parents' accounts of their reasons for accessing private tuitions varied from a strategy for addressing perceived shortcomings in school quality to an extra 'boost' for learning, which was further connected in some cases to a desire to make up for shortcomings in the family's cultural capital. Parents' accounts of gaining access to schools through special schemes, including the 25% reservation, also illuminate the significance of different forms of capital throughout such processes.

9.4.1 Tuitions

Whilst being aware that tuitions were prevalent at the national level from existing statistical data, with ASER 2013 indicating that 22.6% and 26.1% of children (lower and upper primary respectively) in rural areas of the country were attending private tuitions in 2013 (Pratham, 2014), and other studies indicating that tuitions are accessed even at the earliest stages of schooling (Rana et al., 2009), I was surprised at the extent of tuition uptake within the study sites by families accessing both private and government schools. Indeed, only eleven of the 58 families interviewed across all study sites were not accessing private tuitions at all for any child and there

seemed to be no clear pattern distinguishing parent choosers in this respect. Indeed, aside from the small number of disengaged choosers, all other parent choosers seemed equally likely to be accessing such services across all localities, although some aspirational choosers in Location B noted either that they could not afford tuitions in addition to school fees or that they felt able to teach their child at home. However, overall the findings are consistent with Majumdar's (2014) claim that 'privately paid educational supplementation is part of the norm rather than the exception in many parts of India now' (p. 5).

In some cases, the expense of private tuitions was considerable. For example, one mother, Bhavna, told me that she was paying Rs. 3,500 per month in tuition fees for her three children,¹³¹ which she was only able to afford with financial support from her extended family, a priority for her as a strategic attempt to fulfil the family's academic aspirations.

We were being asked [Rs.] 4,000. We requested a lot and got it fixed at this rate.

(Bhavna, mother; Location B, unaided private schools)

Bhavna's account also reflects the practice of fee bargaining (Srivastava, 2005), more commonly associated with school access. Although some parents did bargain in the sense of attempting to secure fee-free places at some schools (see p. 292), tuition fees generally seemed to be more negotiable, as in Bhavna's case. Some tutors also characterised their fees as varying depending on household circumstance and the needs of an individual child.

The cost of tuitions could also not be completely explained by chooser category, with some minimally engaged and community choosers paying more for tuitions than aspirational choosers. In general terms, tuition fees were lower than school fees, starting at around Rs. 100 per month according to parents, but generally around Rs. 250 to 300, making such services possibly more attainable for lower

¹³¹ Bag et al. (2016) found that 90% of their survey sample of JJC households in Delhi had an income under Rs. 8,000 per month (see footnote 51, p. 117), suggesting that what Bhavna was paying in tuitions represented around 50% of the average income of typical JJC residents.

income households than unaided private schooling. However, paying tuitions fees that were high compared to likely average income levels in each basti was also common, even for parents accessing government schooling.

Affordability thus remained an issue in terms of tuition fees, as expected for any service that is not free. This meant that some aspirational choosers chose to prioritise schooling over tuitions or made compromises in terms of how many children were sent for tuitions in the family. In general, financial resources were concentrated on the oldest or only boy in the family, as part of the wider trend for prioritising boys' education (see Chapter 7). For example, for Babita's family, the financial outlay of private tuitions was seen as an investment in her son's future and a strategy for getting ahead in College entry examinations:

Since he wants a good College that is why we are sending him to tuition [...] He has to learn so we have to make him smarter.

(Babita, mother; Location B, government and private aided schools)

This decision also involved compromise, in that Babita's younger children were not accessing private tuitions, with the household budget identified as the key limitation.

Aside from tuitions providing an 'extra boost' to children's learning, some parents also told me that tuitions were necessary to overcome quality failings in their children's schools:

I can't say that I am fully satisfied [with the school]. It is okay. But, as you know, here in Delhi, tuitions become such a necessity [...] School itself says so. They themselves are conscious about their [poor] quality.

(Krishnan, father; Location B, private aided school)

Indeed, parents across all case sites and accessing all school types noted that a key reason for accessing tuition services was because they had been advised to do so by their child's teacher. However, this was not always taken as an indicator of poor quality and seemed to be accepted by parents accessing what they perceived as high quality schools. One father, for example, spoke about the need to maintain 'standards' when describing his reasoning for seeking private tuitions for his son:

[RA: And why are you sending him [your son] for private tuitions as well? Why is that important?]

Due to the standard of [name of school]. It is very high. So parents need to maintain standards. Due to the child being born in a rural area, he has not found a good environment for him. All parents have to give standard.

(Sachin, father; Location A, selective government school) ¹³²

Ensuring that one's child is keeping up with other children – or indeed that parents were seen to be abiding by expected norms in this respect - may thus also be part of the rationale for selecting private tuition services despite financial constraints. This strategy and perceived 'shortfalls' in the family's cultural capital was made more explicit by parents who spoke about their own comparative lack of formal education, which prevented them from helping their children with their school work:

They are studying now, but how will I help them when I don't know what is written in their diary or copies [notebooks]? So I send them for tuitions too.

(Sunita mother; Location C, unaided private school)

Thus, tuitions were one method for overcoming perceived quality failings in schools, as well as a conscious strategy of compensating for a family's lack of cultural capital and as part of what seemed to be the wider normalisation of tuitions as part of children's educational lives.

As noted in Chapter 7, minimally engaged choosers sometimes left the specific choice of tutor up to their child (see p. 211). However, how aspirational choosers identified specific tutors and distinguished between them seemed to be equally ad hoc and not necessarily driven by specific quality indicators, with most parents saying that they had identified a tutor through a social contact, sometimes specifically identified as someone with particular insight and/or in a high-status profession. For example:

¹³² This particular interview was conducted in a mixture of Hindi and English. This extract is a verbatim quote in English.

We have a doctor near our house whose daughter studies there.

(Ridika, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Interviews with private tutors and my own observations at established tuition centres also illuminated the variability of provision and associated quality of tuition services. For the six tutors that I interviewed (see Appendix L), private tuitions were a way of working part time to earn money for their families and, for the younger tutors, to put themselves through College; an exception was a tuition centre in Location C that was supported through charitable donations. No tutors who were interviewed had an official teaching qualification and five described beginning to give tuitions when they themselves were still at school, some as early as Class VIII. Thus, while tuitions were a strategy that parents across case sites deployed to try to ensure children's learning, the ultimate effectiveness of this was by no means guaranteed.

9.4.2 School access schemes

Tooley & Dixon (2005) propose that scholarships and school vouchers are key routes to enable lower income households to access private schooling. However, despite some commentators welcoming the introduction of the RtE Act 25% reservation, emerging evidence suggests that the enactment of this scheme is proving problematic in practice (Noronha & Srivastava, 2013; Mehendale et al., 2015). Such empirical data is supported by the findings of the current study, which suggest that families with 'know how' or other forms of capital were better able to utilise specific strategies for gaining admission to desirable schools through the reservation. Indeed, simply knowing about the reservation should be understood as a considerable advantage within the market given that most parents who were interviewed were not aware of it, although some expressed a general awareness of government schemes to support school access.

Across the data set, five of the 58 households interviewed were identified as having gained access to a school through the RtE Act 25% reservation (three in Location A and two in Location B). However, it was notable that three of these households described receiving some additional 'assistance' in this process, typically

through a social contact who helped them to bypass regular admission procedures.

For example:

[RA: And how did you get admission for him at [name of school]?]

I have a contact with a Member of Parliament of New Delhi and I asked him to help me get admission. He did not help me. I also know the driver of [government official], who has admitted his child in [name of school] and he helped me.

[RA: So was there a lottery or anything like that for admissions?]

No lottery, there was an interview with the principal and then he was admitted.

(Sachin, father; Location A, selective government school)

Admission interviews are prohibited at all government schools (see section 6.2.1), illustrating not only how regulations may not be enforced consistently, but also the differing experiences of parents in education markets and the strategic use of social capital by some parents. Thus, while, Meenu had had to gather a range of documents and open a bank account to enter her niece in the admission lottery for the RtE Act 25% reservation, which she described as taking considerable time and effort, another parent acknowledged explicitly that he had used false documents, organised through a work contact, to gain admission for his younger daughter at a local private school in Location B under the same reservation.¹³³ This required economic capital, social contacts and a degree of cultural 'know how' and supports the findings of Noronha & Srivastava (2013), who describe a similar account of a parent who was likely ineligible for the scheme utilising false documents in this way.

The importance of 'knowing the right person' was also echoed in Laila's account of gaining access to a private school for her sister under the RtE Act 25% reservation, in this case a person at Laila's place of work:

¹³³ This was only disclosed at the end of the interview, perhaps when he felt more comfortable in sharing this sensitive information when trust had been established between us.

[My sister] was a little lucky also, and it turned out there was someone known. On that basis hers was done. Through EWS. Otherwise she too would have had to study in government schools.

(Laila, daughter of Rabia; Location A, private and government schools)

Maitra et al. (2014) suggest that the RtE Act may provide new opportunities for girls to attend private schools, as it did for Laila's sister. However, in addition to having 'someone known', Laila also emphasises the serendipity that enabled this outcome. An element of luck in being able to leverage resources at a strategic moment in time was also evident for other families who had negotiated other means of fee-free access to desirable schools, as Manika describes:

[RA: So how did you manage to get admission there if they aren't taking new pupils?]

The Gurdwara helped us. I am [physically] disabled as well so that helped. There was an election in the Gurdwara and that person is also Chairman of that school and so he helped to get admission for people here.

(Manika, mother; Location A, unaided private school)

Manika's utilisation of social capital to secure school access for her children illustrates the way in which social capital, fostered over a long period of time, may be leveraged strategically by multiple local actors with varying agendas, as well as the degree of 'luck' that this may entail. Similarly, one father described capitalising on the retirement of the principal at his sons' private school to negotiate a transfer to the less expensive private aided school also overseen by the school's management:

Two years later, to transfer to [name of school] was problematic as they were not ready to admit them. But since the principal was retiring, another teacher convinced him to do well by these two children for retirement.

(Kayaan, father; Location B, private aided school)

Thus, aspirational choosers and apparently 'successful consumers' were reliant upon enabling circumstances to gain access to schools that facilitated their strategic actions and associated resource leverage.

9.5 Choice outcomes: no voice, no exit

As a result of the various constraints that parents encountered in realising their choice preferences for their children, school choice outcomes were found to involve significant compromises. Consequently, very few parents across any case site reported feeling completely satisfied with their child's current school in terms of quality. Notable exceptions were the parents described in the previous section, who had gained access to schools under the RtE Act 25% reservation or other pathways for fee-free school access. However, moderating aspirations with respect to school quality was a common strategy adopted by parents in the face of significant disadvantages within the education market.

Indeed, very few community, aspirational or minimally engaged choosers reported having exited a school because of quality concerns, although some did talk about doing this in the future (for example, entering admission lotteries again the following year). In some cases, this was related to cost considerations, as Harini explained:

We will find a better school than this. We do want to change the school but it is very expensive.

(Harini, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Thus, the decision whether to exit or to remain in a current school was ongoing within many households. How parents prioritised different aims with respect to their children's schooling and how parents came to terms with not being able to realise choice preferences are addressed in the remainder of this section. In the latter case, Bourdieu's theory of practice, and specifically the concepts of habitus and field, is used to understand how some parents came to rationalise school choice outcomes that were seemingly at odds with their stated preferences.

Aspirational choosers who had chosen 'against the grain' in terms of community affiliations to access what they saw as better quality schooling for their children (see section 7.4) still described moderating their quality aspirations

significantly as market consumers. One such mother, Sanjana, dismissed a question about the best school she could think of in this way:

I don't dare to think about good schooling because I don't have the capacity to pay for it. I don't have the money, so why think these schools and about sending them there? Why think about it?

(Sanjana, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

Similarly, Minakshi, another mother from the Tamil community, who like Sanjana had chosen a local private school over the Tamil-medium school, also described quality compromises that centred on non-academic aspects of school quality, including a constructive relationship between teachers and parents. As Minakshi related:

[RA: What do you get fined for?]

Well, one thing is if a boy urinates. Parents are called and asked to clean that. We are paying fees for cleaning, but are called when a small child has urinated. 'Your child has done something, you have to clean it'. This is humiliating for us. It makes me so angry! This is discriminating against us! It also happened to a relative of mine too, they also called her about this.

(Minakshi, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

As is apparent from this extract, Minakshi was very angry at the discriminatory treatment that she felt that she and others in her family experienced from school authorities. Despite this, and examples she gave of the bullying her son experienced from teachers and other pupils, Minakshi continued to send her son to this school. Thus, a trade-off between wellbeing and learning outcomes was the quality compromise that Minakshi felt that she had to make in view of affordability constraints and what she perceived as the superior academic quality of the school. However, it is important to recognise that there was an emotional cost to this decision, as evident in Minakshi's anger towards the school during the interview.

The emotional costs of schooling decisions were also evident in the anxieties that seemed to surround admissions for some parents. Some aspirational choosers described feeling forced into choosing the school that their child currently attended

so that a year of school would not be 'wasted', reflecting concerns over what I identified as key barriers to school access earlier in this chapter. For example:

The schools we had seen, the donations were a huge amount, so we weren't able to afford it. And basically there was no one known to us who could get the admissions done. And on top of that there was the fact that a year would be lost; the admission dates were going by. So, with a lot of difficulty, wherever we go... we thought that the year must not be spoilt.

(Laila; Location A, unaided private and government schools)

Anxieties surrounding school admissions may also have been one factor that encouraged some parents not to change schools even when they were dissatisfied with a school's quality. For example, one father explained that while he would prefer to send his sons to unaided private schools, the 'all-through' nature of his older son's private aided school meant that he and his wife could 'relax':

We felt that he will not have to be admitted to a school in Class VI. So shifting of schools would be avoided [...] This is the only school till Class XII [in the area].¹³⁴ So we were relaxed.

(Sai, father; Location B, private unaided and aided schools)

Sai explained that the family was also planning to move their younger son to this school, even though he believed there was little to no effective education happening in the private aided school:

Whatever he [older son] knows, we have taught him. He learned in tuitions.

(Sai)

Government schools were ruled out as 'even worse than this [school]', while the fee at the private aided school was described by Sai as 'nominal' in comparison to much more expensive private schools in the area. Thus, quality conscious parents still described making significant compromises in schooling decisions in view of other constraints and priorities. The rationalisation of an apparently poor school as an

¹³⁴ This was not in fact the case, as unaided private schools, government schools and another private aided school in the area all ran up until Class XII (Appendix IK).

acceptable choice, one about which Sai and his wife could 'relax', also resonates with Bourdieu's theory of practice in terms of the ways in which perceptions of the social world may be structured to reflect the interests of dominant social classes. Thus, highly unequal schooling options are accepted rather than challenged in ways that ultimately serve to preserve socio-economic stratification within the schooling sector, troubling the assumed association in much choice policy discourse between the exercise of parental 'participation' via choice and parental empowerment.

At the same time as parents voiced serious concerns about school quality in interviews, very few parents described raising complaints directly with school authorities or teachers. Across both private and government schools some who had complained were also not satisfied that they had been listened to. For example:

I have spoken to the teacher several times about these things. I asked her why students were making noise. I feel strange whenever I go to the school and see children making noises in the classroom in the presence of teachers [...] But they [teachers] don't pay any heed.

(Reenu, mother; Location B, private aided school)

Others were more positive about being listened to by their children's teachers. Neel, for example, noted that the principal at his daughter's private school 'scolds the teachers in front of us', although he was also dismissive of the school's overall quality. However, in several cases parents explained that they had not complained to their children's schools directly even when they were very unhappy with the quality of teaching and learning. For example, Arjun felt reluctant to complain about his sons' aided school, somewhat paradoxically not wanting the teacher to get into trouble and at the same time in anticipation that complaints would be rejected by the school authorities:

I did not go for making a complaint. When everyone is facing this problem, then why should it be just us who complain about it? A meeting would be conducted and he [the teacher] would lose his job. So we did not go for complaining. It's a government school, not a private one that is taking charges for educating the kids. Had it been, we could have said something. We don't have to pay money in government schools. Education is free there. They would say are you paying anything? This is what we would get to hear.

(Arjun, father; Location B, private aided school)¹³⁵

However, while in the above extract Arjun suggests that he would have felt able to raise a complaint in an unaided private school because the payment of fees would confer greater consumer power, this was not always borne out in reports from parents who were accessing private schooling. For example, Minakshi, despite her unhappiness with significant aspects of her son's schooling, characterised parent-teacher meetings as one-sided with little, if any, constructive discussion between parents and teachers:

[RA: Do you have any PTA [Parent-Teacher Association] meetings, or a time when you can speak to teachers?]

We are called to school for the parent-teacher meetings, but only the teachers speak, you just keep silent. We are only called to pay a fine or to correct bad behaviour.

(Minakshi, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

While neither Arjun nor Minakshi were planning on exiting their children's respective schools or complaining to school authorities, loyalty to the school does not seem to explain the decision to stay in either case. Nor does it seem adequate to label either parent as an 'inert client' (Hirschman, 1970), as both were quality conscious but had made the deliberate decision to remain. Instead, this moderation of quality expectations within heavily constrained circumstances could be understood as a rejection of higher quality options that were perceived as anyway not available to them (Bourdieu, 1990a). Thus, for many parents, schools regarded as better quality

¹³⁵ All parents who were accessing this school referred to it as a government school in interviews.

than those the family was currently accessing were simply considered impossible and were excluded from the choice landscape, with the likelihood of a complaint resulting in effective change regarded as equally unachievable.

Such accounts also offer a different perspective on the lack of close engagement that some school staff felt characterised parents' involvement with schools. For example, two of the four school staff interviewed in Location B (a private aided and a lower fee, unaided private school) commented that parents rarely came to parent-teacher meetings and only visited schools when exam results were published. Parent accounts, however, illuminate that what teachers perceived as a lack of care and a focus only on 'results' could have been the result of differential power dynamics between teachers and parents.

Similarly, building on the findings of Chapter 8 concerning how mothers' lack of formal education could constrain their motherwork (see section 8.3.4), the emotional accounts that some mothers across all localities gave concerning their own lack of formal education and regrets in this respect may help to explain the reticence and feelings of shame that some described when visiting their children's schools. In contrast to the 'fish in water' state that Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) suggest social actors will experience when their habitus encounters a field with which it is familiar, the 'fish out of water' sensibility that some mothers described when visiting their children's schools is suggestive of a mismatch in habitus, and of the unequal power dynamics between them and their children's teachers. For example:

I did not know anything; I could not even write my name. I have to leave a thumb's impression in their school. If I could read and write, I would stand in the front of any queue but now I just stand behind mutely.

(Adena, mother; Location C, unaided private and government schools)

I am not educated and so I am embarrassed when I have to visit somewhere. When I am asked to sign a paper in school, I feel very embarrassed.

(Harini, mother; Location B, unaided private school)

The emotional impact of such encounters between a person's habitus and a social world with which it is not familiar may thus help to explain the apparent unwillingness of some both minimally engaged and aspirational choosers to engage with school authorities directly, as a strategy of protection and self-exclusion (Reay, 2005). In this way, structural constraints to accessing quality education were internalised, the mismatch between parents' habitus and school spaces (fields) shaping parents' relationship with school providers and limiting their ability to adopt customer behaviours within education markets. Such accounts illuminate how the relationship between parents and schools was shaped by existing social inequalities, challenging the concept of consumer sovereignty as sufficient for interpreting how education markets may operate in practice.

9.6 Conclusion

Building on the findings presented in Chapter 7, the findings presented in this chapter concerning parents' accounts of school selection and their assessments of school quality further trouble the concept of tacit knowledge as sufficient for explaining how parents assess quality. Echoing empirical research in other low-income contexts where parents' education is limited (Balarin, 2015) and the concerns of Sarangapani & Winch (2010), the findings illuminate how, while most parents desired 'good education' and aspirational choosers made concerted attempts to realise such academic ambitions, they lacked the specialist knowledge and skills to assess learning effectively. Similarly, the ad hoc approach to the selection of specific private tuitions, while at least for some a strategy for overcoming quality failings in schools, highlights how accessing such services does not in itself indicate specific insight concerning the quality of such providers.

Although manifesting in slightly different ways in different localities, depending upon the requirements of individual providers, the findings concerning constraints to school access are consistent across localities and across categories of parent chooser. Accounts of corruption and differential experiences of school admissions indicate how parents were differently advantaged in their ability to

realise quality preferences. However, while a limited number of parents were able to utilise 'choice' to their advantage, most were also reliant on a degree of serendipity. Success was thus highly individualised rather than systemic.

The findings concerning parental response to perceived quality failings further trouble arguments for a market-led approach to education delivery for the purposes of quality improvement and consumer 'empowerment'. Very few parents expressed satisfaction with the school that their children were attending currently, but even fewer described having exercised either voice or exit in response to perceived quality failures of a specific school (as opposed to the decision to reject the government sector entirely). Furthermore, while some parents felt that paying fees would increase schools' accountability, this did not seem to be borne out in practice. Parents who stayed in what they perceived as poorly performing schools were not inattentive to quality failures, or necessarily loyal to the school providers, but moderated their quality expectations in view of structural constraints. In this way, the findings challenge the choice-competition-quality model assumed in rational choice theory and indicate that socio-cultural perspectives on social reproduction provide more helpful insights into how education markets function in practice.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

10.1 Introduction

This thesis has sought to interrogate critically the core assumptions of rational choice arguments for school choice for low-income households in the Indian and other national contexts; that is, that school choice advances both school quality and social equality agendas. A key assumption underlying the approach taken here is that an examination of the *processes* leading to parental decisions is needed to understand the quality and equality implications of the choices of lower income households. A related assumption is that an examination of such processes requires an attentiveness to the intersecting social, material, political and economic contexts in which they take place. Accordingly, the specific research questions guiding this thesis, and introduced in Chapter 1, were:

- RQ1: What are the contexts in which parents are making decisions about their children's education?
- RQ2: How do parents distinguish between schools?
- RQ3: How do parents experience and negotiate choice processes?
- RQ4: What are the consequences of increased marketisation for social equality?

Informed by these research questions, a nested, collective case study design centred on three low-income localities in Delhi (referred to in the thesis as locations A, B and C). This allowed the study focus – household decision-making – to be contextualised within local market, city-wide and national education policy settings. This design allowed comparisons to be drawn across cases; interviews with parents enabled the collection of rich, narrative data of decision-making to elucidate aspects

of choice that cannot be captured using other methods such as survey tools or through the analysis of enrolment data alone.

I begin the chapter by synthesising the most important empirical findings and analytic insights of the thesis to highlight its core arguments (sections 10.2.1-10.2.5), before turning to methodological contributions (section 10.3) and policy implications (10.4). Finally, I propose future areas of research based on these contributions (section 10.5).

10.2 Research Findings: the empirical and analytic contributions of the study

This thesis set out to address current gaps in knowledge concerning the school choice processes of lower income households in the contemporary Indian context, with a particular focus on how and why parents choose the schools and services that they do for their children, and the relationship between these choices and educational and social inequality. In doing so, the thesis was concerned to connect the micro realm of decisions made by individual actors within individual families to broader social processes surrounding market-led reforms in the Indian context, and to global debates concerning education marketisation.

In Chapter 2, I outlined the growth of the private schooling sector in India and the concurrent government policy trend towards market-led education reforms that have centred on enhancing 'choice' for the ascribed purposes of improved quality and equality, also indicating how these policies have been mediated in Delhi. In subsequent chapters I have sought to interrogate the applicability of theoretical perspectives underlying 'school choice' reforms, which hold that school choice policies improve the educational opportunities available to socially and economically disadvantaged groups by providing enhanced access to a better quality education. The empirical work reported in Chapters 6 to 9, and based on a nested research design outlined in Chapter 4, offered a detailed analysis of the school choice processes of lower income parents across three low income localities in Delhi. The analysis used theoretical resources introduced in Chapter 5 to trouble the core assumptions of rational choice theory and redirect the academic debate towards a

more nuanced approach that takes seriously the socio-cultural aspects of choice-making. In the following sub-sections, I draw together the key insights and arguments of the study, focusing on the core substantive themes of parental quality assessments (sections 10.2.1 and 10.2.2), constraints on the realisation of choice preferences outside the home (sections 10.2.3), how gender and community affiliations shape choice preferences (section 10.2.4), and choice-making inside the home (sections 10.2.5).

10.2.1 Limitations of parental quality assessments

In accordance with the expectations of rational choice theory, I found that concerns about quality were important to how parents across all case sites distinguished between schools. However, I also found that, while most parents who were interviewed wanted their children to receive a ‘good’ education, there was variation as to how this was conceptualised and the extent to which parents were able to assess quality education effectively. The empirical findings presented in Chapter 7 capture parent articulations of school quality, which I demonstrated operated along a spectrum from relatively generalised notions of ‘good education’ to desires for more specific learning outcomes.

In the analysis, I have demonstrated that parents could be categorised according to the specificity of their quality articulations, which aligned to relative hierarchies between families according to occupation and parents’ level of education and schooling choices. The two largest categories, virtually equal in size and found in similar proportions within each study area, were termed *minimally engaged choosers* and *aspirational choosers*. *Minimally engaged choosers* were notable in their use of less specific articulations of quality indicators and by the fact that they were not taking specific action based upon these indicators. The result was that their children were largely sent to the closest government or private-aided school. By contrast, the *aspirational choosers* used more specific terminology to articulate their quality perceptions and took active measures to try to enrol their children in schools which they perceived as ‘better’. The result was that *aspirational choosers* were more likely to have rejected the mainstream government sector, even if this was only

possible for one child in the family. While unaided private schooling was preferred, specific schooling decisions were also influenced by the mix of schools within each locality, with private aided and selective government schooling acceptable alternatives in Location B and A respectively. A third smaller, but significant, category, termed *community choosers*, prioritised community solidarity over perceived quality. The composition of this group was based around specific religious and regional identities and in this study was found only in areas B and C, and at private schools (aided and unaided). The fourth group consisted of the completely *disengaged choosers*, whose children were not attending school at all. This group is probably under-represented in my data given the non-random nature of participant recruitment but is important to recognise in a context where education is not compulsory.

The findings indicate that the more specific articulations of school quality expressed by aspirational choosers did not equate to more sophisticated assessments or indicators of school quality. While ‘good teaching’ was valued by most parents, the strategies that some parents described for assessing children’s learning, and the inadequacy of the quality proxies they used, revealed that their lack of specialist knowledge undermined their ability to assess educational quality effectively, and so to align their educational aims with choice preferences in practice, as studies of private school choice in other lower income contexts have also identified (Balarin, 2015). Drawing attention to significant information asymmetries in education markets, these findings are important because, while there is an identified trend towards government reforms and associated policy rhetoric emphasising ‘choice’, and indeed an increased emphasis on parental responsibility for fulfilling UEE objectives by exercising a choice, it would appear that parents have not been enabled to engage in meaningful choice in practice, a key argument that I return to in section 10.2.3.

In addition, in the context of ‘grey areas’ in government regulation of the unaided private sector and the contested nature of school quality discussed in Chapter 2, the empirical findings show that parents across all case sites were heavily reliant on social networks for information about schools. This information was by

nature partial and unevenly distributed across families, and those parents without the requisite social capital were unable to tap into this 'hot' knowledge (Ball & Vincent, 1998). At the same time, while the education 'grapevine' may have provided insights for some parents, the reliance on their own personal experience of schooling, plus rumour and gossip in shaping narratives of schooling across localities, fed into wider social discourses of derision concerning government schooling rather than helping parents to distinguish between individual schools based on key quality insights.

These findings are important because the decision to exit the government sector by aspirational choosers does not appear to be based on reliable quality discernment and hence likely to result in better quality education. Thus, while ascribed quality was important in how parents described differences between schools and in informing the decision by some parents to exit the government sector, it does not follow that 'choice' is based on objective measures of quality and furthermore that choice will result in quality improvements via enhancing competition between schools. In this way, while quality has been posited as driving the expansion of low fee private schooling across the country, the superior quality of such schools cannot be established based on parents' accounts of decision-making.

10.2.2 Quality assessments and social aspirations

In contrast to the concept of tacit knowledge, which the analysis in Chapters 7 and 9 suggested cannot adequately explain quality perceptions and preferences, the Bourdieusian and interpretivist consumption approach adopted in Chapter 7 illuminated that the choice of unaided private schooling was underpinned both by a desire for academic quality and by social aspirations. The analysis demonstrates that the desirability of English may be understood as a response to labour market demand, as well as a reflection of associations between English, fee-paying schools and broader social advantages. I argue that schooling choices reflect manifested 'tastes' based on social distinctions, which in practice may be both a deliberate strategy of delineation on the part of some households as well as a more unconscious alignment to normative, middle class aspirations. Thus, choice serves to undermine common

good aspects of education by reinforcing social hierarchies, while families continuing to access government schools are transformed into 'visible losers' (Connell, 2013b, p. 4) in the market, necessary to encourage other parents to become winners by engaging in consumer behaviours via choice and financial outlay.

The analysis demonstrates how the educational consumption practices of India's middle classes do not only reflect but actively produce social markers of class membership. In education markets across case sites, schools were attuned to such 'quality' indicators in terms of the desirability of English-medium education, utilising English as a 'floating signifier' (Ball, 2000, p. 10) of quality and desirability. In addition to reinforcing a narrow conception of quality, the false promise of English-medium in schools across case sites highlights, in the context of inadequate regulation by government, one of the 'grey areas' surrounding the private sector identified in Chapter 2 of this thesis. This illuminates how normative, middle class educational aspirations exclude lower income and otherwise disadvantaged families by framing certain choices (i.e. private education) as 'necessary' when the ability to choose remains constrained, highlighting how the interests of the wider citizenry may become marginalised in a marketised environment.

Similarly, the findings indicate a high take-up of private tuitions across all case sites, supporting Majumdar's (2015) observation that tuitions have become increasingly normalised in recent years, part of the accepted necessity of significant financial outlay for children's education, and a further example of how middle class educational aspirations become normative in ways that disadvantage lower income families. Indeed, many parents were accessing tuitions because they had been advised to do so or felt that there was an expectation that they should to ensure children's learning and to demonstrate their responsibility as parents. The findings suggest that differing fee levels made tuitions more accessible to families than unaided private schools, but fee levels varied greatly as did the professionalisation of such services. Based on my observations of tuition classes and interviews with tutors, tuitions were of mixed quality. In the absence of any form of regulation, selection of individual tutors was haphazard; minimally engaged choosers were also more likely to leave the choice of provider up to children themselves. This is

important because parents were differently advantaged in their ability to distinguish between providers based on quality of teaching and learning, with accessing tuitions and additional expenditure no guarantee of educational success.

10.2.3 Unequal choices: barriers to access

The findings presented in Chapter 9 indicate that admission ‘lucky draws’ run by some unaided private and selective government schools create a sense of possibility among parents, but success seems to be limited in practice. Realising choices thus necessitates luck as well as more material and social advantages. However, unofficial school entry requirements, such as the provision of recommendations from social contacts and ‘donations’, are also widely perceived to be necessary to secure admissions. Findings also indicate a lack of widespread knowledge of the RtE Act 25% reservation as well as evidence of corruption in implementation, echoing those of Mehendale et al. (2015) and Srivastava & Noronha (2016). At the same time, while since the time of fieldwork the Government of the NCT of Delhi has introduced an online portal for the application and allocation of RtE Act reserved seats to try to combat corruption in admissions (DoE Delhi, 2015), it is unclear how most parents interviewed for this study would access this resource. As with admissions procedures at the time of fieldwork, those with the ‘right’ skills and know-how, as well as the necessary material resources such as access to a computer, are more likely to benefit. Information asymmetries are also notable in terms of varied awareness of quality between households. Parents with access to the ‘right’ forms of capital (largely the aspirational choosers) are thus more likely to be able to exploit choice mechanisms, with increasing privatisation unlikely to benefit most families in India (largely the minimally engaged choosers), who will continue to access government schooling.

A further key contribution of the study is the insight that parents were not quality unconscious, but generally accepted that they were not able to access schools that they perceived as better quality; some were in this sense thwarted choosers, as I identified in Chapter 9. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, I showed that, while minimally engaged choosers effectively excluded themselves

from choice at the first stage of the decision-making process, aspirational choosers attempted to realise preferences via active choice. However, they were not always successful. Indeed, the findings show that very few parents expressed satisfaction with the school that their children were currently attending. At the same time, even fewer described having exercised either voice or exit in response to quality concerns within a specific school (as opposed to the decision to reject the government sector entirely). However, parents across all school types who kept their children in what they perceived as poorly performing schools were not inattentive to school failures - and thus not 'inert' clients - but described moderating their quality expectations and aspirations in view of structural constraints, in some cases, prioritising non-educational aims that they felt could be fulfilled. Possibilities and constraints were thus normalised and internalised by parents in ways that served to preserve social class hierarchies of access to education. This may be one reason why a relatively high proportion of seats under the RtE Act 25% reservation have apparently gone unfilled in Delhi (see p. 57), as elsewhere in India, as parents rule themselves out of attempting to utilise such schemes in view of the likelihood of failure. It is thus far from clear that economic theories of consumer behaviour in markets are applicable to education settings, or that policy reforms concerning parental 'participation' via school choice will lead to the empowerment of consumers in ways that do not risk their rights as citizens becoming subsumed.

In summary, the universal acceptance of educational inequalities and hierarchies of access across all case sites, which means that parents do not generally persist in seeking the 'best' school available, poses a direct challenge to notions of consumer sovereignty in exactly the circumstances in which this is assumed to operate. Thus, without other efforts for systemic quality improvement as well as efforts to mitigate the effects of relatively privileged households exiting the government sector, the findings concur with sociological studies of school choice in other national contexts that pro-market approaches have the potential to entrench rather than to disrupt the reproduction of social inequalities through education.

10.2.4 Beyond quality: gender and community affiliations

The findings also show that quality was not the only or indeed the most important consideration for some families. In the analysis presented in Chapter 8, I demonstrated that the gender order shapes girls' freedom of movement and schooling decisions via social norms surrounding personal relationships, cultural expectations of motherhood and women's participation in the labour market (Connell, 1987;2009). In particular, my findings confirmed existing studies of schooling in India that have identified the perceived value of at least a basic level of education within the marriage market as a key driver behind some parents' decision to enrol their daughters in school (Chopra, 2005; Srivastava, 2006). However, in addition to cost, which has been identified by other researchers as an important constraint with respect to school access for girls (Maitra et al., 2014), I found that gendered conceptions of 'safety' also shaped parents schooling choices. Thus, while single-sex schools close-to-home were preferred for girls, boundaries could be extended for boys if 'suitable' schooling was not available in the immediate vicinity. The rejection of single-sex government schooling for boys in all localities, necessitating the selection of unaided private schooling, was also framed as a safety concern, arguably distracting from what was in practice unequal financial investment in boys' and girls' education.

Furthermore, building on earlier work that has a sociocultural orientation, but that has not yet been applied to the Global South, the analysis has sought to focus attention on the salience of parental identity for understanding schooling choices that are at present overlooked by the rational choice approach. In particular, the deliberate course of action taken by *community choosers* to build and to maintain connections with other households based on regional and religious affiliations, which I term *forging solidarities*, illustrates the social significance of schooling choices for parents as individuals and serves to draw attention to the socially situated nature of schooling decisions. This insight challenges the assumption of the politically and culturally neutral consumer who chooses with only a single child's interests in mind, thereby illuminating the fact that parents do not

always behave as consumers in education market spaces in the ways that policy-makers may predict, with choice functioning as a strategy of affiliation and differentiation of 'people like us' from 'people *not* like us' (Alexander, 2013). Hence the findings imply the importance for policy-makers of understanding parental priorities with regard to their children's education in order to best align policy action with broader societal goals for social equality.

In summary, data and analysis presented in this thesis illuminate the inherent difficulty in balancing individual and societal interests in choice-making. This add further empirical weight to concerns over the role of parents as proxy consumers in education markets (Brighouse, 1997), a conceptual shortcoming of rational choice theory as applied to education, and to Goswami's (2015) argument that the growth of the private schooling sector in education in India is of considerable significance for gender equality.

10.2.5 School choice as motherwork

By examining family decisions in the context of school choice, thereby connecting sociological perspectives on the family to the field of education and 'choice' reforms, I demonstrated in Chapter 8 that school choice processes emerged as significant in the negotiation of maternal identity and authority within some households. Building on empirical work conducted in other social contexts in India (Donner, 2005) and elsewhere (David et al., 1994; Reay, 1998; Cooper, 2009) that has identified that children's schooling and school choice are activities often deferred to mothers and utilising Collins' (1994) concept of motherwork this chapter illuminated mothers' labour concerned with protecting the interests of children and seeking the power to improve children's lives.

In some cases, such 'motherwork' involves mothers taking on paid work to be able to afford private schooling for their children, as well as advocating that children be enrolled in or remain in school, sometimes in the face of resistance from their husbands and extended family members. This is not to dismiss the choice exercised by fathers, or to suggest that fathers do not express a strong commitment to their children's education in many cases. Nevertheless, it appears that the day-

to-day work of children's schooling often falls to mothers, and is shaped by intersections of class, caste and other aspects of social identity, necessitating strategic means of influencing schooling choices without subverting gender norms of conduct and authority within the domestic sphere. In contrast to a rational choice approach, the analysis thus illuminates the socially situated nature of mothering practice, whereby mothers were differently advantaged in their ability to engaged in 'choice' and to realise choice preferences.

I found that different forms of motherwork were evident within all case study areas. However, there were some key category characteristics. Within the 'aspirational' category the presence of an active, employed and/or more educated mother lay behind the active selection of unaided private schooling. However, amongst minimally engaged choosers it was clear that in some cases motherwork had resulted in a child attending school where they otherwise might not have attended at all, even if further activity to enact aspirational choices was perceived as being beyond reach. Further research may also elucidate motherwork among the disengaged and community choosers where the number of mothers interviewed was too small to draw clear inferences.

At the same time, the analysis also illuminates how motherwork may be co-opted within a marketised system that necessitates an intensified, consumer model of engagement with schools, serving to reinforce gender ideologies and middle-class expectations of 'good' mothering. As Nambissan (2010) points out, expectations of mothering within middle class families in India have shifted in recent years in response to changing social class structures, globalisation, and the associated pressures of economic competition. The associations between girls' education and 'good' mothering, and the social expectation that mothers' work should focus on the project of children's educational success for the purposes of individual socio-economic advantage in a consumer-led mode of engagement, may thus serve to undermine the concept of motherwork as the collective and empowering practice that Collins (1994) and Cooper (2009) assert. In this way, the analysis both extends and troubles the concept of motherwork, although, as discussed below, further

research is required to understand the different aspects and experiences of choice work by mothers.

10.3 Methodological contributions

Studies of school choice are often framed in the abstract rather than nested in specific market settings. A key contribution of this study to case study methodology is through its development and deployment of a *nested* research design, which incorporated a relational understanding of place in the study of education markets and choice. Informed by theoretical perspectives from critical geography that have troubled the notion of ‘boundaries’ in case study research, this nested approach sought explicitly to integrate contexts into the analysis as an intrinsic aspect of the study design thereby illuminating the dynamic and multi-scalar influences on social action. Significant differences in the number and type of schools in each case site demonstrate the importance of material contexts to choice-making. For example, how preferences for single-sex schooling played out through schooling decisions in Location A, as explained in Chapter 7, show how school enrolment patterns were shaped by the dynamic between local material contexts (the number and type of schools) and social structures (gender ideologies). Preferences were thus shown to be socially produced and manifested in local contexts rather than free-floating.

Similarly, a nested approach illuminates how comparison may be utilised within case study research to support theory building in ways that extend the opportunities for comparison beyond that for replication purposes. For example, the development of the concept of *forging solidarities* was enabled through comparison between case sites, whereas in a singular case study this may have been conceptualised only as linguistic or religious preference. At the same time, attention to influences operating at different scales, with choices nested within these contexts, creates the potential for locally situated case study research, such as that reported here, to interrogate the dynamic dialectic between the local and the global thereby contributing to global debates surrounding education marketisation.

Finally, my findings confirm the necessity of methodological rigour when making knowledge claims concerning the 'low fee' private sector and the households which are accessing such schools. The homogenisation of 'the poor' in some studies of LFP schooling in India (see, for example, Tooley, 2005b) must be challenged for failing to capture nuances in the socio-economic and cultural background of households and, hence, for failing to reflect on the effects of these on choice preferences. Without such clarity, there is a danger of insufficient attention on the drivers behind private sector growth, the segregating effects of schooling choices, and differences between parents that shape how far and in what ways they adopt (or feel able to adopt) consumer behaviours in education markets.

10.4 Policy implications

The findings from this study suggest that market-led reforms are unlikely to lead to greater equality of access to quality schooling. My data concerning barriers to school access illuminate the highly constrained circumstances within which 'choice' is conducted, where market experiences are heavily informed by the resources to which families have access. While the RtE Act has in some cases facilitated school access, corruption concerning the allocation of reserved seats - including false documents and 'backdoor' access through social contacts - undermines the potential of the scheme to meet its stated objectives of educational inclusion. Thus, while choice policies may benefit some parents, market-led approaches are likely to entrench existing hierarchies as government schools remain the perceived choice of last resort for 'unsuccessful' parent consumers.

Other researchers have posited that attempts to improve quality schooling in India should have an informational component, to allow parents to make 'better' schooling choices (Muralidharan & Sundararaman, 2015). However, my findings suggest that this may not be the most effective policy response to address inequalities. Indeed, in many cases parents perceived that the school(s) they were currently accessing were poor quality but did not exit for a variety of reasons. Constraints surrounding school entry, exit and voice may mean that, even if parents

had detailed information about schools with respect to quality (whatever this might entail in practice), they would not necessarily be able to act on it. Furthermore, the findings suggest that parents valued factors other than education quality in their schooling decisions, such as community affiliations. This is not to suggest that parents should be denied information, but to point out that a focus on more or 'better' information concerning key quality indicators keeps the onus on parents to 'choose better' rather than acknowledging the structural constraints that shape access to quality education.

Contributing to global debates concerning the decentralisation of education systems, my findings also suggest that the introduction of new school operators via PPP schools may exacerbate existing hierarchies within the government sector. Given that parents described how social contacts and 'know how' as well as financial and material resources were necessary for gaining access to desirable schools, the further diversification of the government school sector may well intensify the 'cream skimming' of students, and discourses of derision surrounding government schools and the students within them. In addition, given what I have demonstrated to be the inadequacy of the concept of tacit knowledge to explain how parents' judge quality in view of significant opacity within the schooling sector, further diversification without the associated 'top down' quality assurance and accountability systems to oversee school operators is unlikely to result in equality of access to quality education.

10.5 Future areas of research

Based on the study findings and building on the research literature in other national contexts, a key area of future research work concerns school choice within the context of the family. This includes both familial dynamics of decision-making within intergenerational and extended family contexts and a particular focus on the role of mothers within choice processes. In relation to the former, this study was necessarily limited because of time and person-power constraints, which has restricted the sample size of the study. The interviews were very time-consuming,

and there was inevitably a trade-off within the study between depth and breadth. While I set out to interview one parent from each household and sometimes interviewed parents jointly, future research interviewing both parents within a family could be useful in providing different perspectives within the family unit on children's schooling and the negotiation of choice within this context. Interviews with other family members, such as children themselves, would also allow for a more in-depth analysis of intergenerational dynamics shaping decision-making processes. Such dynamics include how gender ideologies may be reinforced and/or challenged through the family via choice work

In terms of mothers and choice, the analysis contributes to research in other national contexts that has identified the central role of mothers in choice work, and, in doing so, extends the understanding of such choice work to focus on mothers' labour inside as well as outside the home. Applying and extending the concept of motherwork to different caste, regional and religious minority groups, in India but also in other national contexts, may elucidate specific insights for social researchers interested in women's empowerment, motherhood, and family relations. Future research efforts could thus include interdisciplinary investigations of mothers and school choice in other socio-cultural settings to elucidate the relationship between maternal identity, domestic authority and children's education.

A key limitation in the current study concerns the enactment of school admissions from the perspective of schools. While some school representatives who I did manage to interview talked to me about admissions processes, these accounts did not give an in-depth picture of how this was managed in practice. If access and time had allowed, data collection in schools (e.g. observations) would have enabled a richer and more detailed picture of the relationship between schools and households, and, potentially, would have enabled me to verify household accounts of donations and other technically illegal practices. A focus on the relationship between schools and parents, and the various practices through which this is mediated, would be a fruitful area for future research helping us to understand better how parents negotiate their role as consumer-citizens in the contemporary education landscape.

The core argument of this thesis is that rational choice theory is insufficient for understanding how choice operates; rather choice is better seen as a social practice that has resonances across different social spheres. This way of understanding choice is more closely aligned to sociological theories of social reproduction and consumption than the strictly economic basis of rational choice theory, suggesting that there are lessons to be drawn from this study for economists interested in developing more nuanced models of decision-making than those implied by assumptions of economic rationality. Indeed, a fruitful area of future research work would be to investigate whether preferences surrounding social identity as identified within this study, such as those encapsulated by my concept of *forging solidarities*, could be incorporated within predictive models of decision-making by economists interested in developing more nuanced models of consumer behaviour than those offered by traditional rational choice approaches.

10.6 Final thoughts

The findings presented in this thesis contribute new empirical evidence concerning decision-making processes amongst lower income families in Delhi. Whilst the study focuses on a specific location and social context, the findings also generate insights that are of broader relevance to studies of school choice, private schooling and family dynamics of decision-making outside the immediate study settings, and contribute to global educational debates concerning education marketisation. Building on existing research on choice in India as well as other national contexts, the analysis illuminates the nature of school choice as socially situated, and as *deeply personal* rather than the *impersonal* tool for quality improvement that education policy discourse frequently implies. In this way, when the educational landscape in many countries is increasingly conceptualised as a market space, where choice is both necessitated and measures of school quality are reduced to quantifiable components, I have demonstrated that rational choice assumptions are inadequate for interpreting how parents negotiate education markets in practice, with the growth of private provision and associated 'choice' reforms in India and other countries more likely to exacerbate social inequalities than to act as a panacea.

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Appendix A: Interview schedule, households

1. Family background

- a. How many children do you have?
 - i. Ages
 - ii. Schools
- b. What is your job? What about your wife/husband?
- c. Have you always lived here? How long? Where before?
 - i. Likely to move in the future?
 - ii. Has the area changed in recent years?

2. School choice

- a. Can you tell me a bit about when you first started thinking about a school? How did you go about it?
 - i. Did you visit any schools when you were making your decision? Did you speak to the head teacher? Teachers? What did you ask them? What did they talk to you about?
 - ii. Did you talk to anyone about your decision (e.g.) family, friends, neighbours? Did they give you any information/advice?
 - iii. Are you happy with the information that you received? Do you feel like you had enough information to make an informed decision?
- b. Why did you choose that/those schools for your children?
 - i. Possible prompts: perceived quality; infrastructure; recommendations from other families in the area; medium of instruction
- c. Did you think about any other schools in the local area?
 - i. Did you rule out any schools?
- d. What did you have to do for the admissions process?
 - i. Did you find it straightforward?
- e. Has your child ever gone to any other school than the one they attend now?
 - i. If applicable: how many schools have they attended? Why did they leave their last school to go to their new school? Explore in more detail if child has been enrolled at multiple schools.
- f. Do you feel satisfied with the available school choices? If not, what choices would you like?

- i. Did you feel limited in any way in your schooling decisions (e.g.) by money, quality available, ability to travel outside of area?
- g. Family roles:
 - i. Did you discuss the decision as a family?
 - ii. How involved was your child in this process?
 - iii. Who made the final choice?

3. Education quality

- a. Do you feel happy with the school you child is going to now?
 - i. Why, or why not?
- b. What do you think makes a 'good' school?
 - i. What is it important for children to learn at school?
 - ii. What facilities should a good school have?
 - iii. What should the teachers be like?
 - iv. What do you think is the best school that you know of? Why? How did you come to know about it?
- c. How do you know if a school has these qualities?
 - i. Do you visit the school, ask people for information...?
- d. Perceptions of schooling in the area:
 - i. What do you think of the government schools in terms of quality?
 - ii. How many private schools are there in your area?
 - 1. What do you think of them in terms of quality?
 - a. Prompts: teaching, learning, infrastructure
 - b. Are there differences between different schools (i.e. Are some 'better' than others)?
- e. Plans for children's education post-primary
 - i. Where do you see your child going next? What age do you think they will leave school?
- f. Overall, do you think it is important to send you child to school (can also tailor by specific stage)?

4. Private tutoring

- a. Is tutoring being accessed for any child?
 - i. Motivation for accessing (not satisfied with school; for a particular subject).
 - 1. If different for different children, why?
- b. How did you decide which tutor to go to?
- c. How much does the private tuition cost?
- d. Are you satisfied with the service that you have received?

5. Other

- a. Are you involved in the school in any other way (e.g.) the school management committee?
- b. Do you ever visit your child's school? Do you ever talk to their teachers? What about? What do they tell you?
- c. What was your experience of education? (Did you go to school, till what year, feelings about school...)
- d. Have you heard of the RTE scheme – free places for EWS/SC/ST children at private schools?
 - i. If yes: how did you hear about it? Did you think about applying for it?
- e. If you could improve the education system in the area, what would you do?
- f. Is there anything that I haven't asked you that might be useful for me to know?

Appendix B: Interview schedule, education professionals

1. Background

- a. Name of school/service
- b. How long been open
- c. How many children enrolled
- d. Fee paying?
- e. Selection criteria (if applicable)?

2. Purpose of education

- a. Why do you think that parents choose to send their children to school?
- b. What is the main aim of your school (i.e. what do you want to have achieved by the time the children graduate)?
- c. Children's education post-primary:
 - i. Where do you see the children at your school going next?
What age do you think they will leave school? What might they end up doing after school?

3. School choice

- a. Why do you think that parents have chosen to send their children to your school/service?
- b. What sort of things do you think that parents think about when choosing a school for their child?
- c. Do most parents approach you first, or do you do any marketing/recruitment in the community?
 - i. If so, what? Any materials can share?
- d. What sort of information do you give to parents before their child enrolls? (if applicable)
- e. Do you see a lot of parents at your school on a regular basis? How do you communicate with them and how often? (if applicable)

4. Community

- a. What is the typical profile of a child attending your school? (if applicable)
 - i. Family income, locality, caste etc.
- b. Have you seen this change over time? If so, why do you think that this is?
- c. How many schools are there in this area? (If applicable) Do you feel any competitive pressure with any of them?

5. Other

- a. Impact of RTE (Right to Education Act, 2009)?
- b. Have you experienced multi-enrolment of children at your school and other schools in the area?
- c. Do you offer private tutoring, or have multiple school sessions in a day?
- d. Anything else you'd like to tell me that we have not covered already?

Appendix C: List of thematic codes (parent interview data)

1. Objectives

- Marriage
- Work
- Independence
- Good citizen
- Self-development (behaviour)
- Better life
- Better mother
- Expectation
- Skill (learning)

2. Quality perceptions

- Private
- English
- Curriculum
- Extra-curricular
- Cohort
- Teacher activity
- Facilities
- Communication
- Safety

3. Other choice factors

- Cost
- Community
- Distance
- Perceived ability

4. Information source

- Social network
- Personal experience
- School
- Children

5. Decision-making in the family

- Mother
- Father
- Joint (parents)
- Child
- Extended family
- Family conflicts

6. Emotions

- Frustration
- Pride
- Shame
- Anxiety
- Satisfaction
- Ambivalence

7. Parental resources

- Economic
- Social
- Knowledge

8. Admissions

- Fee
- Donation
- Exam
- Lottery / limited places
- Forms
- Interview
- Documents
- RTE

9. Choice outcomes

- Satisfied
- Exit
- Plan to exit
- Complain
- Unsatisfied – stay
- Compromise

10. Gender

11. Tuitions (other)

- Homework
- Child care
- Lack of knowledge (parent)
- Productive time
- Support

Appendix D: List of analytic codes

1. Choice-making: realising choices
 - Social capital
 - Cultural capital
 - Economic capital
 - Fish in water
 - Fish out of water
 - Hot knowledge
2. Gender
 - Gender – labour
 - Gender – power
 - Gender – cathexis
 - Gender - resistance
 - Motherwork
3. Choice-making: differentiating between schools
 - Forging solidarities
 - Brand identity
 - Distinction
4. Choice outcomes
 - Exit
 - Voice
 - Virtue of necessity
 - Compromise

Appendix E: Example of a coded transcript (extract – English only)

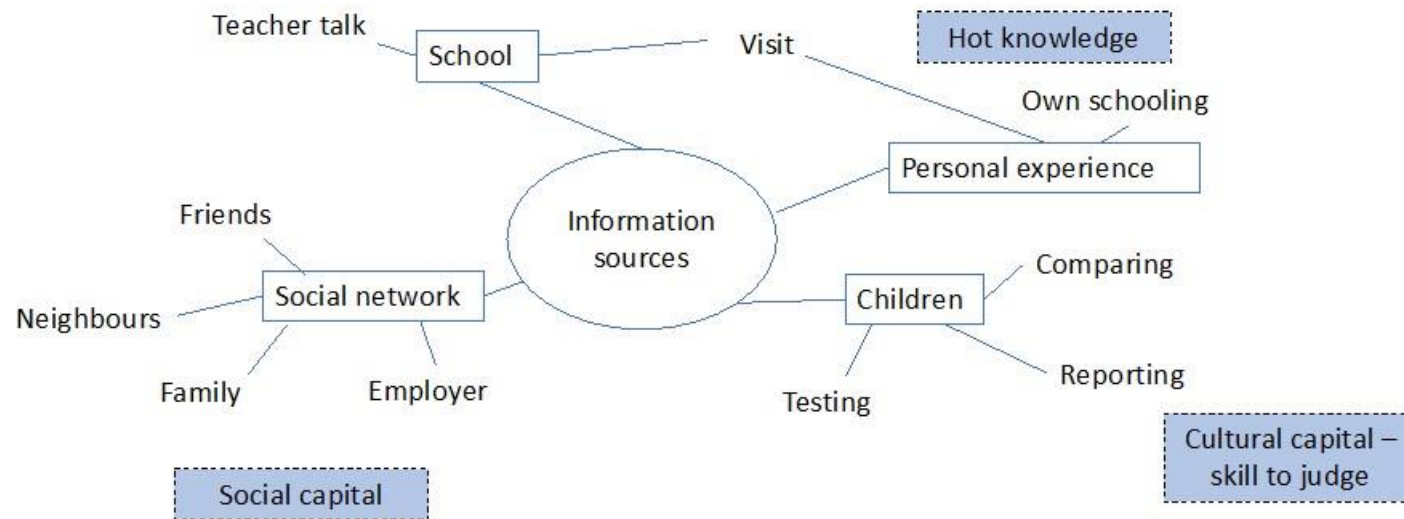
Transcript	Thematic codes	Analytic codes	Notes
EG: Okay. So why did they choose that school?			
RA: She wants to know why you chose the school in [place name] for your daughter.			
VI: Actually, we were not getting admission anywhere here. We were facing a lot of problems everywhere we went for admission. Some sought donations; others said they only take a limited number of students, so these were problems that we faced. I had filled forms in 5-6 Kendriya Vidyalayas but didn't get through so in the end we admitted her here to ensure her year doesn't go spoiled. My sister lives there so we easily got admission in that school.	Donation Limited places Forms Social network Social	Economic capital Social capital Compromise	Trying multiple schools Popularity of KVs – note comments MCD later in interview.
RA: So she stays with your sister right now?			Daughter was in home with parents at time
VI: Yes, she stays with my sister.	Social		Living away from home – extended family (REF other locations)
RA: Ellie, he is saying that he had tried to get her admitted in nearby school but he didn't get due to, someone asked			

him for donations and other schools were saying that they had very limited seats. And that he had applied in 5-6 Kendriya Vidyalayas but didn't secure admission there as well. And his sister is living there so the girl is living with his sister.			
EG: I see. And is that, did his sister know of the school?			
RA: About this school?			
EG: Yeah. Is that why they made that decision?			
VI: It is very close by.	Distance		School/sister? Both? Meaning ambiguous Area is in West Delhi
RA: She wants to know if your sister knew about the school.			
VI: Yes, she told me it was a good school.	Social network	Hot knowledge	
RA: She told you about the school?			
VI: She told me when she heard that my daughter didn't make it to any other schools. She advised me to admit her there.	Social network Extended family Gender	Social capital Gender - power	Discussing decisions within wider family Sister – key informant and helper Link to motherwork?
RA: His sister had introduced him to that school. She heard that the school is good and told him to get her admitted.			

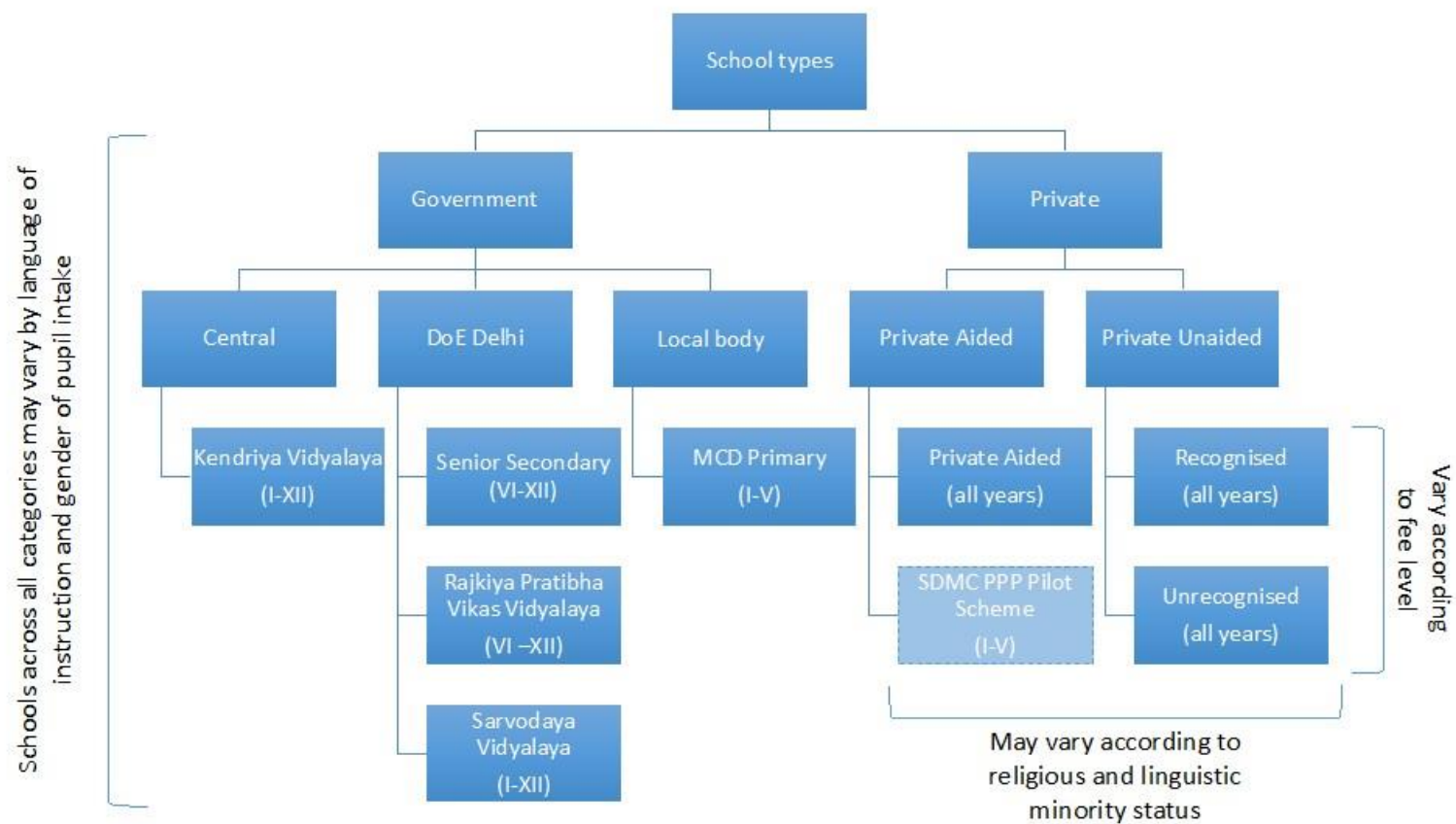
EG: Okay. Did they go to the school before getting admission?			
RA: She wants to know if you went to the school before admitting her.			
VI: Yes, we had gone to the school.	Personal experience	Hot knowledge	
RA: Yes, he had visited the school.			
VI: We went to the school; saw it; it is a good school.		Hot knowledge	
EG: And how is the admission, actually, what did they like about it when they first went?			
RA: She wants to know what you liked about the school when you saw it for the first time.			
VI: First of all, we liked that not only the teachers of the school but even the students were speaking in English. So we thought everyone here, including the teachers, are talking in English which doesn't happen in other schools. We thought it would be good for our child.	English Cohort	Distinction	Possible suggestion at 'English culture'? REF: K (Location B) Quality perceptions
RA: Ellie, he is saying that what I liked about the school is not only the teachers are speaking English but even the students who are attending the school are also talking to each other in English. So that's the thing which he liked and made him decide.			Comparison with other schools part missing We vs I - translation
EG: And why was English so important?			

RA: She wants to know why English is important for you.			
VI: It is important because we cannot talk in English and so we face a lot of problems. So the next generation should not face similar problems; it should be easy for them.	Better life Skills	Cultural capital	Personal experiences— own lack of learning.
RA: What kind of problems you face since you don't know English?			
VI: Since we don't know English, it is difficult to fill forms or understand a lot of things which are written in English. And then the school was in our budget.	Knowledge (lack of) Cost	Cultural capital Economic capital	School admission documents (REF – later in interview)

Appendix F: Code map, information sources



Appendix G: School types in Delhi



Appendix H: List of schools, Location A

School Code	Type	Established/ Recognised	Classes	Enrolment (I-VIII)	Co- ed	Girls (%)	No. of teachers (I-VIII)	Av. Class size	Medium of Instruction		Monthly fee (Rs.)	Private school fee level
A1	PUR	1967/1986	LKG-IV	54	Yes	33	7	8	English		1,800	Mid
A2	Cent	1972	I-XII	2459	Yes	40	69	36	English	Hindi	Free-500	
A3	DOE	1962	PP-XII	480	No	100	11	44	English	Hindi		
A4	MCD	1962	PP-V	386	Yes	52	12	32	Hindi			
A5	PUR	1959/1961	LKG-XII	2128	Yes	42	55	39	English		Unknown	(Higher)
A6	PUR	1996/2001	LKG-XII	1516	Yes	45	58	26	English		From 2,900	Higher
A7	MCD	1977	PP-V	122	Yes	44	5	24	Hindi			
A8	DOE	1986	I-XII	1590	Yes	40	59	27	English	Hindi		
A9	DOE	1982	PP-XII	571	No	0	17	34	Hindi	English		
A10	DOE	1962	PP-XII	716	Yes	67	16	45	Hindi	English		

Note: Data for years 2014-2015.

Schools shaded in grey represent schools accessed by households that were interviewed.

() Indicates school visited, but unable to confirm fee level.

Appendix I: List of schools, Location B

School Code	Type	Established/ Recognised	Classes	Enrolment (I-VIII)	Co-ed	Girls (%)	No. of teachers (I-VIII)	Av. Class size	Medium of Instruction		Monthly fee (Rs.)	Private school fee type
B1	PUR	1989/1993	LKG-XII	626	Yes	34	34	18	English		From 2,240	Higher
B2	MCD	1971	PP-V	118	Yes	45	5	24	Hindi			
B3	PA	1968/1969	I-X	246	Yes	49	12	21	Hindi			
B4	PUR	1978/1986	LKG-XII	429	Yes	32	17	25	Hindi	English	From 2,200	Higher
B5	PUR	1977/1992	LKG-XII	1097	Yes	43	35	31	English		Unknown	(Higher)
B6	MCD	1967	PP-V	98	Yes	49	4	25	Hindi			
B7	DOE	1958	VI-XII	328	Yes	45	14	23	Hindi	English		
B8	PUR	1971/1978	LKG-XII	889	Yes	32	31	29	English		From 2,750	Higher
B9	DOE	1952	VI-XII	285	Yes	40	6	48	Hindi	English		
B10	PA	1961	I-XII	799	Yes	42	11	73	English	Hindi		
B11	PUU	1985	LKG-VII	120	Yes	Unknown			English		750 - 1,200	Lower-Mid
B12	PUU	1997	LKG-V	280	Yes	Unknown			English		From 900	Mid
B13	DOE	2004	VI-XII	173	Yes	29	10	17	English			
B14	DOE	1955	PP-XII	721	Yes*	85	18	40	Hindi	English		
B15	PUR	1981/1990	LKG-X	447	Yes	37	14	32	English		From 1,850	Mid
B16	DOE	1955	VI-XII	272	No	0	9	30	Hindi			
B17	MCD	1958	PP-V	338	Yes	49	10	34	Hindi			
B18	MCD	1957	PP-V	90	Yes	26	4	23	Hindi			
B19	MCD	1950	PP-V	138	Yes	46	5	28	Hindi			

School Code	Type	Established/ Recognised	Classes	Enrolment (I-VIII)	Co-ed	Girls (%)	No. of teachers (I-VIII)	Av. Class size	Medium of Instruction	Monthly fee (Rs.)	Private school fee type
B20	PUR	1955	I-XII	397	No	0	Unknown		Hindi	Unknown	
B21	MCD	1957	PP-V	162	Yes	49	3	54	Hindi		
B22	DOE	1996	VI-X	387	Yes*	80	Unknown		Hindi		
B23	PUR	1965/1967	I-X	287	Yes	38	Unknown		English	Unknown	
B24	PUR	1960	I-V	193	Yes	40	6	32	Hindi	Unknown	(Lower-Mid)

Note: Data for years 2014-2015

School numbers shaded in grey represent schools accessed by households that were interviewed

* Indicates school listed as single-sex, but enrolment data show co-educational.

() Indicates school visited, but unable to confirm fee level.

Appendix J: List of schools, Location C

School Code	Type	Established /Recognised	Classes	Enrolment (I-VIII)	Co-ed	Girls (%)	No. of teachers (I-VIII)	Av. Class size	Medium of Instruction		Monthly fee (Rs)	Private school fee type
C1	PUR	1985/1989	I-VIII	242	Yes	34	9	27	English	Hindi	Unknown	
C2	PUR	2001/2003	I-V	417	Yes	42	9	46	English		Unknown	
C3	PUR	2004	PP-V	166	Yes	36	6	28	English		Unknown	(Lower)
C4	PUR	2000	I-V	182	Yes	48	5	36	English		Unknown	
C5	PUR	1979/1983	PP-X	823	Yes	35	17	48	English		From 1,000	Mid
C6	PUU	2004	PP-VIII	Unknown					English		From 500	Lower
C7	PUR	1975/1982	PP-XII	1846	Yes	41	61	30	English		Unknown	(Mid-Higher)
C8	PUR	2014	I-V	238	Yes	35	6	40	English		Unknown	
C9	PUR	1995/1997	I-VIII	409	Yes	36	9	45	English		Unknown	
C10	PUR	1998/2002	I-V	144	Yes	36	6	24	English		Unknown	
C11	PUR	2014/2015	PP-V	168	Yes	47	6	28	English		From 300-400	Lower
C12	PUR	1982	PP-V	107	Yes	43	6	18	English		From 400	Lower
C13	PUR	1984/1987	PP-X	841	Yes	41	12	70	English		Unknown	(Mid-Higher)
C14	PUR	2001	I-V	339	Yes	43	6	57	English		Unknown	(Lower)
C15	PUR	1971	VI-X	482	Yes	32	10	48	English		Unknown	
C16	PUU	Unknown	PP-X	Unknown					English		Unknown	(Mid)
C17	PA	1975/1988	I-XII	1051	Yes	38	18	58	Hindi			
C18	PUU	1996	PP-X	Unknown					English		From 1,400	Mid
C19	PUR	2014	PP-V	87	Yes	55	6	15	English		Unknown	(Lower)
C20	PUR	1980	I-V	232	Yes	50	5	46	Hindi	Urdu	Unknown	
C21	PUR	1972	I-V	180	Yes	46	6	30	Hindi		Unknown	

School Code	Type	Established /Recognised	Classes	Enrolment (I-VIII)	Co-ed	Girls (%)	No. of teachers (I-VIII)	Av. Class size	Medium of Instruction		Monthly fee (Rs)	Private school fee type
C22	PUR	1993	I-VIII	490	Yes	44	10	49	Hindi		Unknown	
C23	PUR	1995	I-VIII	224	Yes	38	9	25	Hindi	English	Unknown	
C24	PUR	1999	I-V	220	Yes	38	5	44	English		Unknown	
C25	MCD	1965	PP-V	498	No	100	8	62	Hindi			
C26	MCD	1997	I-V	441	No	0	11	44	Hindi			
C27	MCD	1997	I-V	616	No	100	18	34	Hindi			
C28	MCD	1998	I-V	538	No	0	18	30	Hindi	English		
C29	MCD	1974	PP-V	450	No	100	15	30	Hindi			
C30	MCD	1974	I-V	380	No	0	11	35	Hindi			
C31	MCD	1985	I-V	420	No	100	12	35	Urdu			
C32	MCD	1987	I-V	362	No	0	9	40	Urdu			
C33	MCD	1986	PP-V	618	No	100	20	31	Hindi	English		
C34	MCD	1974	I-V	610	No	0	18	34	Hindi	English		
C35	MCD	1973	PP-V	408	Yes	43	12	34	Hindi			
C36	MCD	1973	I-V	494	No	100	14	35	Hindi	Urdu		
C37	MCD	1973	I-V	480	No	0	15	32	Hindi	Urdu		
C38	MCD	1970	I-V	468	No	100	15	31	Hindi	Urdu		
C39	MCD	1972	I-V	422	No	0	16	26	Hindi	Urdu		
C40	MCD	1965	PP-V	498	No	100	8	62	Hindi			
C41	MCD	1965	I-V	445	No	0	13	34	Hindi			
C42	MCD	1960	I-V	220	Yes	54	11	20	Hindi			
C43	DOE	1948	PP-XII	901	No	0	26	35	Hindi	English		
C44	DOE	2011	VI-X	545	No	100	8	68	Hindi	English		

School Code	Type	Established /Recognised	Classes	Enrolment (I-VIII)	Co-ed	Girls (%)	No. of teachers (I-VIII)	Av. Class size	Medium of Instruction		Monthly fee (Rs)	Private school fee type
C45	DOE	1962	PP-XII	876	No	100	23	38	Hindi			
C46	DOE	1984	VI-XII	359	No	100	13	28	Hindi	English		
C47	DOE	1984	VI-XII	714	No	0	15	48	Hindi			
C48	DOE	1971	VI-X	445	No	0	10	45	Hindi			
C49	DOE	1979	VI-X	494	No	0	14	35	Hindi	Urdu, English		
C50	DOE	1998	VI-X	549	No	100	20	27	Hindi			
C51	DOE	2002	VI-XII	510	No	0	14	36	Hindi			
C52	DOE	2002	VI-XII	415	No	100	12	35	Hindi			
C53	DOE	1977	PP-XII	1543	No	0	26	59	Hindi	Urdu, English		
C54	DOE	1977	PP-XII	2290	Yes	93	43	53	Urdu	Hindi, English		
C55	DOE	2011	VI-XII	536	Yes	60	14	38	Hindi			
C56	PUR	2014	I-V	321	Yes	45	8	40	English		Unknown	
C57	PUR	1990/1992	PP-XII	378	Yes	38	8	47	Hindi	English, Sanskrit	Unknown	
C58	PUR	1980/1989	I-VIII	717	Yes	42	18	42	English		Unknown	
C59	PUR	1986/1998	I-XII	84	Yes	13	Unknown	Unknown	Hindi	English	Unknown	
C60	PUR	2001	I-VIII	237	Yes	51	8	30	Hindi		Unknown	

Note: Data for years 2014-2015

School numbers shaded in grey represent schools accessed by households that were interviewed

() Indicates school visited, but unable to confirm fee level.

Appendix K: Fieldwork timeline

Fieldwork activities	2014-2015 (Months)							
	S	O	N	D	J	F		J*
Arrival in Delhi: making living arrangements								
Initial contact with key advisors (NGOs, work contacts, academic contacts)								
Hiring Research Assistants/Translators								
Review of secondary household survey data								
Initial site scoping and selection								
Location A								
Location B								
Location C								
Translation and piloting of interview schedules								
School mapping: utilising observations, interview data, secondary household survey data, DISE data and assembly maps								
Location A								
Location B								
Location C								
Site visits: daily activity in at least one case site, encompassing participant recruitment, observations and field notes								
Location A								
Location B								
Location C								
Interviews with parents/caregivers								
Location A								
Location B								
Location C								
Interviews with education professionals (teachers and tutors)								
Location A								
Location B								
Location C								
Interviews with NGO workers								
Location A								
Location B								
Location C								
Gathering and analysis of written documents (school-based and government policy texts)								
Transcription and translation of interviews (ongoing)								

* two- week period (May 31- June 13)

Appendix L: Education professionals - interviewees

Location	Name	Type of service	Fee level (Rs. per month)	Description	Date of interview
A	Amit	Vice-principal	Free	Government school (Class I-XII)	05/11/14
	Geetha	NGO	Free	Underprivileged women	28/10/14
	Priya	NGO	Free	Underprivileged women	28/10/14
	Rinku	Tutor	250	Class XII graduate; works in partnership with her sister	20/11/14
	Sana	Tutor	300	Class XI graduate	20/11/14
	Ashmita	Tutor	From 200	Owner of a tuition centre; employs six staff members	24/11/14
B	Prachi	Principal	Free	Private-aided school	14/11/14
	Manisha	Principal	Lower-Mid	Unaided private school (unrecognised)	13/11/14
	Tanya	Administrative officer	Mid	Unaided private school (unrecognised)	14/11/14
	Gayatri	Principal	Free	Government school (Class VI-XII)	23/10/14
	Sakshi	NGO	Free	Women's rights	07/10/14
	Anjuli	NGO	Free	Education	04/06/15
	Anna	NGO	Free	Education	10/06/15
	Aditi	Tutor	350	Class XII graduate	19/11/14
	Shyam	Tutor	Average 500 – 600 (max 1,000)	Ex-teacher (private school)	15/02/15
C	Riya	Principal	Lower	Unaided private school (unrecognised)	22/01/15
	Laxmi	Tutor	Free	Tutor at an NGO run tuition centre for children not enrolled in school or at risk of dropping out	06/02/15

Appendix M: Household interviewees

Area	Name	Role	Occupation	Education	Home state	Time ¹³⁶	Spouse		Religion	Caste	Children					Choice group	Tutions	Total tuition fee (Rs) ¹³⁷	Date of interview
							Occupation	Education			Gender	Age	School type	Fee range	Code				
A	Aamrita	Mother	Housemaid	No formal	Jharkhand	18 years	Peon (office) ¹³⁸	No formal	Hindu	SC	B	10	PA	(Social)	OA	M	Y	600	18.02.15
											B	18	DOE		A9				
A	Avani	Mother	Shop owner (petty goods)	Class X	Rajasthan	15+ years	Shop owner (petty goods)	Class XII	Sikh	OBC	B	12	PUR	Mid (Social)	OA	A	Y	1,000	28.11.14
											B	14	PUR	Mid (Scholarship)	OA				
											G	16	DOE		A3				
A	Deepika	Grandmother	Housewife	No formal	Delhi	40+ years	Police officer (son)	Class XII (son)	Hindu	-	B	<1	-			A	Y	400	23.11.14
											G	6	PUR	Mid	A1				
A	Fara	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	2 years	Tea vendor	Class VIII	Hindu	-	B	7	MCD		A4	M	Y	300	28.11.14
											G	12	MCD		A4				
A	Ganika	Mother	Sewing	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	6 years	Labourer	Class X	Hindu	-	G	6	MCD		A4	M	Y	600	18.12.14
											B	10	MCD		A4				
											B	12	DOE		A9				
											B	15	DOE		A9				
											B	17	DOE		A9				
											G	19	(Left after Class VIII; working)						
											G	21	(Left after Class XI; married)						
A	Geetha	Mother	Sewing	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	3 years	Driver (car)	No formal	Hindu	-	B	5	PUR	Lower	OA	A	Y	500	20.11.14
											G	7	MCD		A4				
A	Janvi	Mother	Housewife	Class VI	Uttar Pradesh	10 years	Painter	Class VII	Hindu	-	G	2	-			M	Y	200	28.11.14
											B	8	MCD		A4				

¹³⁶ Indicates length of time respondent has resided in the locality.

¹³⁷ Indicates total tuition fees paid by household per month.

¹³⁸ An errand person.

Key

Caste: SC= Scheduled Caste; ST = Scheduled Tribe; OBC = Other Backwards Caste; G = General Caste; (LM) = indicates inter-caste love marriage.

Gender: B = Boy; G = Girl

School type: Central = school run by central government agency; PUR = Private Unaided Recognised; PUU = Private Unaided Unrecognised; PU(?) = Private Unaided but recognition status unknown; PA = Private Aided; DOE = Department of Education run government school; MCD = Municipal Corporation District run government school.

Fee level: Lower = Fees under Rs. 799 per month; Mid = Fees between Rs. 800 and 2,000 per month; Lower-Mid = Fees vary between these ranges; Higher = Fees Rs. 2,001 or over per month.

Fee level+() indicates: (Social) = fee free organised or paid for by a social contact; (RtE) = accessing school through RtE Act 25% reservation; (NGO) = fees waived as part of locally based NGO scheme; (Scholarship) = fee free through academic scholarship.

Code: Indicates school child currently attending. See Appendices H, I and J for corresponding codes. OA = indicates school located out the local area.

Choice group: A = Aspirational chooser; ME = Minimally Engaged Chooser; D = Disengaged chooser; C = Community Chooser (see Chapter 7 for an overview of these categories).

Tutions: Y = Yes; N = No

Area	Name	Role	Occupation	Education	Home state	Time ¹³⁶	Spouse		Religion	Caste	Children					Choice group	Tuition	Total tuition fee (Rs) ¹³⁷	Date of interview				
							Occupation	Education			Gender	Age	School type	Fee range	Code								
A	Laila	Daughter	Clerical office work	Class XII	Daughter of Rabia (see relevant entry)																		
A	Lalan	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Nepal	14 years	Not working at this time.	No formal	Hindu	-	B	12	DOE		A9	M	Y	250	22.02.15				
											B	18	(Left after Class X; working)										
											B	22	(Left after Class X; working)										
											B	25	(Left after Class X; working)										
											B	28	(Left after Class X; working)										
A	Loshini	Mother	Housewife	Class VI	West Bengal	<1 year	-	-	Hindu	-	G	3	-			M	N		22.02.15				
											G	5	MCD		A4								
											G	8	MCD		A4								
A	Manika	Mother	Laundry service	No formal	Rajasthan	15 years	-	[Not literate]	Sikh	-	B	9	PUR	Mid (Social)	OA	A	Y	1,400	16.11.14				
											B	11	PUR	Mid (Social)	OA								
A	Meenu	Aunt	Housewife	No formal	Jharkhand	15 years	Cleaner in a hospital	-	Christian	ST	G	8	Central	(RtE)	A2	A	Y	500	16.11.14				
A	Mishka	Mother	Sewing	No formal	Rajasthan	13 years	Wife of Rajiv (see relevant entry)		Hindu	-	B	1	-			A	Y	350	06.12.14				
											G	5	-										
											B	8	PUR	Lower	OA								
A	Nisha	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Haryana	-	Wife of Varshil (see relevant entry)																
A	Parul	Mother	Housewife	Class VIII	Uttar Pradesh	6 years	Cycle rickshaw driver	Class VIII	Hindu	-	B	7	MCD		A4	M	Y	800	06.12.14				
											B	10	MCD		A4								
											G	11	MCD		A4								
											G	13	MCD		A4								
A	Prateek	Father	Construction labourer	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	Less than 1 year	Housemaid	No formal	Hindu	SC	G	4	Not in school			D	N		23.11.14				
											G	7											
											G	15											
											B	16											
A	Sachin	Father	Security guard	Higher education	Bihar	3 years	Housewife	No formal	Hindu	-	B	9	Central	(RtE)	A2	A	Y	500	16.11.14				
A	Shalini	Mother	Housemaid	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	12 years (on and off)	Separated; Shalini lives with mother-in-law.		Hindu	SC	B	11	MCD		A4	M	Y	300 (paid by employer)	23.11.14				
											G	13	Not in school										
											G	17	DOE		A3								
A	Shweta	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Jharkhand	7 years	Peon (office)	-	Hindu	ST	G	1	-			M	Y	350	05.11.14				
											G	3	-										
											B	8	PU(?)	Unknown	OA								

Area	Name	Role	Occupation	Education	Home state	Time ¹³⁶	Spouse		Religion	Caste	Children					Choice group	Tuition	Total tuition fee (Rs) ¹³⁷	Date of interview			
							Occupation	Education			Gender	Age	School type	Fee range	Code							
A	Rabia	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	30+ years	Vegetable vendor	-	Muslim	-	G	4	PUR	Mid (RtE)	OA	A	Y	-	06.12.14			
											B	14	PUR	Lower	OA							
											G	16	DOE		A3							
											G	21	(Left after Class XII)									
											G	27	(Left after Class XII; working)									
A	Rajiv	Father	Sewing	Class V	Rajasthan	20 years	Husband of Mishka (see relevant entry)															
A	Ranjita	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Rajasthan	1 year	Construction labourer	No formal	Hindu	SC	B	2	Not in school			M	Y	850	28.11.14			
											B	7										
											G	9										
											G	10										
											G	11										
A	Varshil	Father	Driver (car)	Class X	Delhi	Whole life	Husband of Nisha (see relevant entry)		Hindu	G	G	3	-			A	Y	250	18.02.15			
											G	6	PU(?)	Lower	OA							
B	Aishi	Mother	Housewife	Class VII	Delhi	22 years	Manual technician (local factory)	Class XI	Hindu	G (LM)	B	9	PUU	Mid	B12	A	Y	2,000	10.12.14			
											G	18	DOE		B7							
B	Ananya	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	6 years	Construction labourer	No formal	Hindu	SC	B	12	DOE		B9	M	Y	2,200	15.01.15			
											B	12	DOE		B9							
											G	14	DOE		B9							
B	Arav	Father	Peon (office)	Class X	Tamil Nadu	12 years	Housewife	No formal	Hindu	-	G	4	PUU	Mid	B12	A	N		20.01.15			
											B	7	MCD		B18							
B	Arjun	Father	Cook	No formal	Nepal	3 years	Housemaid	No formal	Hindu	-	B	10	PA		B3	M	Y	1,000	10.12.14			
											B	15	PA		B3							
B	Babita	Mother	Housewife	Class XII	Bihar	+20 years	Owns a juice cart	Class XII	Hindu	OBC	G	12	DOE		B7	A	Y	1,100	03.11.14			
											B	15	PA		B10							
											G	17	DOE		B7							
											B	18	(In College – was in PA)									
B	Balan	Father	Delivery man	-	Tamil Nadu	18 years	Housemaid	-	Hindu	-	G	11	MCD		B18	C	Y	-	20.01.15			
											B	14	Government schools (not in Delhi)									
											G	16										
B	Bhavna	Mother	Cook	Class V	Delhi	Whole life	Deceased; Bhavna lives with extended family.		Hindu	G	G	11	PUU	Lower-Mid	B11	A	Y	3,500	15.01.15			
											B	11	PUU	Lower-Mid	B11							
											B	15	PUR	Higher (RtE)	B4							
B	Garima	Mother	Administrative assistant	Class XI	Delhi	Whole life	Wife of Sunil (see relevant entry)		Hindu	G (LM)	B	8	PUR	Higher	B8	A	Y	300	15.02.15			
B	Gaurav	Father	Salesman	Class X	Uttar Pradesh	30 years	Housewife	No formal	Hindu	-	B	16	PA		B3	M	Y	500	26.11.14			

Area	Name	Role	Occupation	Education	Home state	Time ¹³⁶	Spouse		Religion	Caste	Children					Choice group	Tuition	Total tuition fee (Rs) ¹³⁷	Date of interview
							Occupation	Education			Gender	Age	School type	Fee range	Code				
B	Harini	Mother	Housemaid	No formal	Tamil Nadu	15 years	Driver (car)	Class XII	Hindu	OBC (LM)	G	4	PUU	Lower-Mid	B11	A	Y	1,000	08.02.15
											B	7	PUU	Lower-Mid	B11				
B	Kayaan	Father	Rents out auto rickshaws	Higher education	Bihar	19 years	Housewife	-	Hindu	G	B	13	PA	(Social)	B10	A	Y	2,000	11.01.15
											B	15	PA	(Social)	B10				
B	Krishnan	Father	Driver (car)	Class VIII	Tamil Nadu	20 years	Cook	No formal	Hindu	G	G	13	PA		OA	C	Y	800	12.02.15
											B	15	(Training to be a mechanic – left PA in Class VIII)						
											G	17	PA		OA				
B	Latcha	Mother	Housemaid	No formal	Tamil Nadu	15+ years	Separated; husband lives in Tamil Nadu.		Hindu	SC	B	10	PA		OA	C	N		04.11.14
											G	14	PA		OA				
B	Minakshi	Mother	Housemaid	No formal	Tamil Nadu	4 years	-	-	Hindu	SC	B	5	PUU	Lower-Mid	B11	A	N		19.11.14
B	Murthi	Father	Driver (car)	Class II	Tamil Nadu	Whole life	Housewife	No formal	Hindu	-	G	4	Government schools (not in Delhi)			C	Y	500	08.02.15
											B	7							
											G	8	PA		OA				
B	Neeti	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Nepal	14 years	Works in a hotel	No formal	Hindu	-	B	7	PA		B3	M	Y	800	10.12.14
											B	13	PA		B3				
B	Nimi	Mother	Housewife	Class X	Uttar Pradesh	20+ years	Electrician	Class XII	Hindu	SC	B	<1	-			A	N		03.12.14
											G	2	-						
											G	7	PUR	Mid	OA				
B	Parmita	Mother	Housemaid	No formal	Delhi	Whole life	Labourer	No formal	Hindu	-	G	13	DOE		B22	M	Y	Unknown – paid for by grandmother	15.02.15
											B	17	DOE		B16				
B	Pranav	Father	Cook	No formal	Tamil Nadu	25 years	Housemaid	Class VII	Hindu	SC	B	7	PA		OA	C	Y	100	08.02.15
B	Rakesh	Uncle	Manual labour (government agency)	Class X	Delhi	Whole life	Brother of Bhavna (see relevant entry)												
B	Ravi	Father	Shop owner (electronics)	No formal	Tamil Nadu	30 years	Housewife	Class XII	Hindu	-	B	<1	-			C	Y	200-300 (Ravi unsure)	08.02.15
											G	6	PA		OA				
											G	8	PA		OA				
B	Reenu	Mother	Beauty therapist	Class XII	Delhi	Whole life	Deceased; Reenu living with extended family.		Hindu	G	B	8	PA		B10	A	N		15.02.15
											G	9	PA		B10				
B	Rekha	Mother	Local political role	No formal	Bihar	10 years	Deceased		Hindu	SC	B	15	DOE		B7	D	N		07.12.14
											B	17	DOE		B7				
											B	22	(Left after Class II; working)						
											G	25	(Left after Class V; married)						

Area	Name	Role	Occupation	Education	Home state	Time ¹³⁶	Spouse		Religion	Caste	Children					Choice group	Tuitions	Total tuition fee (Rs) ¹³⁷	Date of interview
							Occupation	Education			Gender	Age	School type	Fee range	Code				
B	Ridika	Mother	Housewife	Class VII	Delhi	Whole life	Manual labour (local government agency)	Class VIII	Hindu	-	B	5	PUU	Mid	B12	A	Y	500	22.02.15
B	Ritvik	Father	Security guard (government agency)	Class XII	Delhi	Whole life	Housewife	Class XII	Hindu	G	G	6	PUR	Higher (RtE)	B1	A	Y	800	23.11.14
											B	8	PA		B10				
B	Sai	Father	Manual labour (government agency)	Class IX	Delhi	Whole life	Husband of Sita (see relevant entry)		Hindu	G	B	5	PUU	Mid	B12	A	N		15.02.15
											B	11	PA	Lower	B10				
B	Samali	Mother	Cook	Class X	Uttar Pradesh	6 years	Security guard	-	Hindu	G	B	9	MCD		B6	M	Y	500	22.02.15
											G	11	MCD		B6				
B	Sanjana	Mother	Housemaid	No formal	Tamil Nadu	5 years	-	No formal	Hindu	SC	B	8	PUU	Lower-Mid	B11	A	Y	350	19.11.14
B	Siddharth	Father	Driver (car)	No formal	Tamil Nadu	+30 years	Housewife	No formal	Hindu	-	G	15	PA		OA	C	N		10.11.14
											B	17	PA		OA				
											G	19	(Left after Class VIII)						
											B	21	(Left after Class VIII)						
B	Simran	Mother	Housewife	Class VII	Uttar Pradesh	8 years	Manual labour (government agency)	-	Hindu	OBC	B	6	PUU	Mid	B12	A	N		04.11.14
											G	7	PUU	Mid	B12				
B	Sita	Mother	Housewife	Class XII	Delhi	Whole life	Wife of Sai (see relevant entry)												
B	Sunil	Father	Manual labour (government agency)	Class X	Uttar Pradesh	Whole life	Husband of Garima (see relevant entry)												
B	Vikram	Father	Driver (car)	No formal	Tamil Nadu	8 years	Housewife	No formal	Hindu	-	G	5	PA		OA	C	Y	350	04.11.14
C	Adena	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	Whole life	Runs a food cart	No formal	Muslim	-	B	6	MCD		C35	M	Y	400	25.01.15
											G	8	DOE		C54				
											G	10	PUR	Lower (NGO)	C11				
											B	12	DOE		C43				
											G	13	DOE		C11				
											G	15	DOE		C11				
C	Ajeeta	Mother	Piece work ¹³⁹	No formal	Delhi	Whole life	Wife of Rahul (see relevant entry)		Hindu	SC	B	3	-			M	Y	350	25.01.15
											B	14	DOE		C43				
											B	18	DOE		C43				

¹³⁹ Work paid for on a piece-by-piece basis (see p. 197).

Area	Name	Role	Occupation	Education	Home state	Time ¹³⁶	Spouse		Religion	Caste	Children					Choice group	Tuitions	Total tuition fee (Rs) ¹³⁷	Date of interview
							Occupation	Education			Gender	Age	School type	Fee range	Code				
C	Nazir	Uncle	Mechanic	Class X	Delhi	Whole life	-	-	Muslim	-	B	5	PUR	Lower	C11	C	Y	500	01.02.15
											B	14	DOE		C54				
C	Neel	Father	Peon (office)	No formal	Bihar	Whole life	Husband of Nina (see relevant entry)		Hindu	G	G	4	MCD		C35	A	Y	350	01.02.15
											G	7	PUR	Lower	C11				
											B	8	PUR	Lower	C11				
C	Nina	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Bihar	6 years	Wife of Neel (see relevant entry)												
C	Rahul	Father	Salesman (medical equipment)	Class XII	Delhi	Whole life	Husband of Ajeeta (see relevant entry)												
C	Sadiq	Father	Shop owner (wholesale goods)	Class XII	Delhi	Whole life	Housewife	-	Muslim	-	B	9	PUR	Mid	C5	C	Y	500	01.02.15
C	Saroj	Mother	Housewife	No formal	Uttar Pradesh	15 years (on and off)	Mechanic	No formal	Muslim	-	G	10	MCD		C35	M	Y	600	18.12.14
											G	15	DOE		C54				
											B	16	(Left after Class VI; working)						
											B	18	DOE		C54				
											G	22	(Unknown; married)						
C	Sandeepan	Father	Piece work	Class VIII	Uttar Pradesh	Whole life	-	Class X	Hindu	SC	G	3	-			M	Y	250	25.01.15
											B	8	MCD		C35				
											B	11	Private school (not in Delhi)						
C	Sunita	Mother	Piece work	No formal	Delhi	Whole life	Electrician	Class V	Hindu	-	B	<1	-			A	Y	-	01.02.15
											G	3	-						
											B	7	PUU	Lower	C6				